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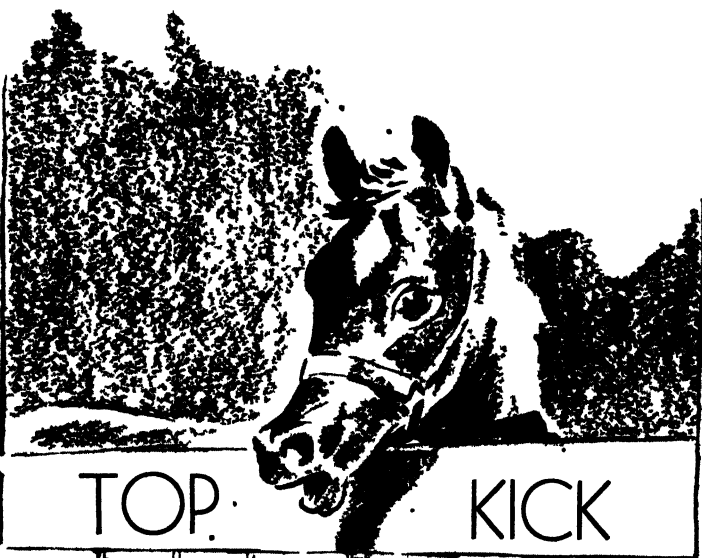
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TOP KICK
U.S. ARMY HORSE

by HELEN ORR WATSON

Illustrations by
Bernard Garbutt

1942
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO. BOSTON
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To
The Army Officer I Married,
A Cavalryman

FOREWORD

For those who love what has correctly been termed one of man's noblest friends — and their number is legion — this tale of Top Kick, U.S. Army Horse, should command wide and intense reader interest.

From the moment, at the beginning of the book, when he is foaled in an Army Remount Depot, on through to his stirring adventures in the Philippines where, just prior to General MacArthur's withdrawal to Bataan Peninsula, he saves the life of his lieutenant, Top Kick never lets the reader down. He is lovable, playful, and mischievous at times. Under fire in battle scenes, he rises to the occasion with intelligence and courage.

Mrs. Watson deserves high praise for the devotion she has given to the intimate study of her equine friends, and for the arresting style she has used in handling the sequences of their training and development.

MAJOR-GENERAL DAWSON OLMSTEAD
Chief Signal Officer, U.S. Army

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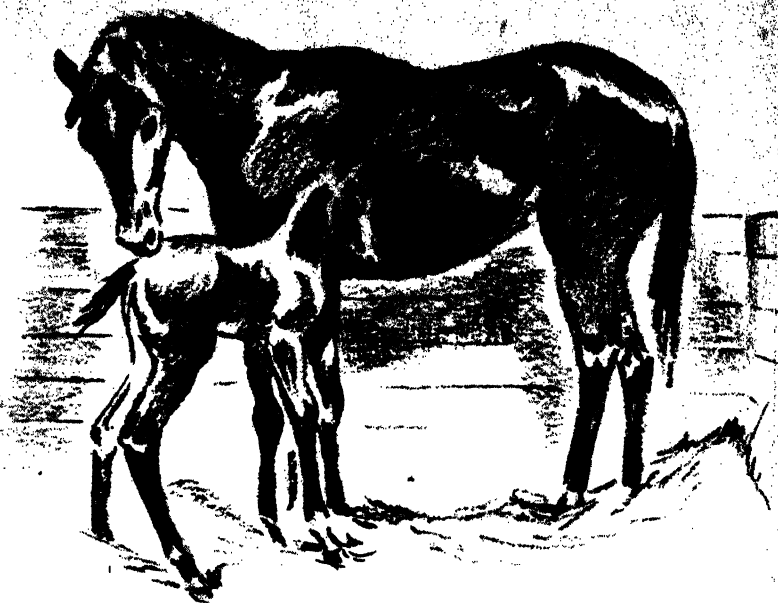
COMRADES

*Better than music, I love the sound
Of galloping hoofs on the hard-packed ground,
Bearing us out of the crowded highways
Into the clean little green little by-ways
Leading to trails where the woods are still,
Or out on the rim of a wind-swept hill.*

*My loyal companion is eager to share
The ring of the road, and the sweet of the air —
Let it be sunny or blustery weather,
Just so my horse and I are together,
We never care if the journey is long
And the going is heavy, for horses are strong.*

*Comrades and friends of the open road,
We subscribe to a gentleman's code,
For he trusts me, to guide him aright,
And well I know, that by day or by night
His heart of a thoroughbred will not fail
To carry us through to the end of the trail.*

Bess Heath



1. THE NEW FOAL

A CHILLY March wind swept over the hilltop, tossing dust and stray pieces of straw into the air and banging a door of the low white stable. It tried to creep under the red roof, wriggle through window cracks, and slip around corners to reach the mares and their young at the Front Royal Remount Depot.

In spite of the wind the corner stall was warm and comfortable for Jenny Wren, the favorite mare of the stable. She nickered and turned her lovely head toward a small brown heap beside her. It moved! A weak little whinny answered her and a tiny head was raised. The bay mare nosed her new foal and nickered again. The baby colt looked at his mother for the first time.

Top Kick

She nudged him gently and he lifted himself on awkward forelegs. But they crumpled under him and he sprawled on the straw with a little grunt.

The two men who watched at the door chuckled. Holding their breath, they waited for his next attempt to get to his feet.

'Aw, say, let me help him up,' said Ben, a young soldier who could not wait a moment longer to see the new foal.

'No, no! He's doing fine. If he can get up in a reasonable length of time by himself, we'll let him do it.'

Again the foal gathered his legs under him, and this time he staggered to his feet. He wavered back and forth to balance himself, but managed to keep standing.

'Hooray, he made it!' cried Ben, his eyes shining.

'Not so loud! You'll scare him. Of course he made it. And only twenty minutes old, too!' said the white-haired old sergeant, glancing at his watch.

Both men looked at the new foal carefully. His ribs stuck out, and over them the brown skin lay in wrinkles like a little old man's. The long awkward legs with their large joints seemed far too big for the rest of him, and his dainty feet too small. But his head was well set on sturdy shoulders, and already he perked up his ears and looked at the men out of his big brown eyes.

'He's a little beauty!' breathed Sergeant Daniels with delight. 'See how good his legs are, as straight as they can be.'

'Four corkscrews, if you ask me!' said Ben.

'Nobody was asking you,' growled the sergeant. 'You're new here. You don't know good straight legs on a foal when you see them. His are just bent from stand-

The New Foal

ing on them the first time. They'll straighten out — you'll see.'

As the men talked, the foal stumbled forward a step or two and dropped in a heap. But soon he struggled to his feet again with less effort than before and began to look for something. He worked his mouth in an odd way which showed some teeth.

'Don't tell me he's born with teeth!' exclaimed Ben.

'Sure he is. Lots of foals come with their first two teeth.'

Jenny Wren was watching her offspring with anxious pride in her eyes. Now she stepped closer to him. The little foal was still hunting; he couldn't find what he wanted. With wobbly legs and uncertain sight he groped over the straw toward his mother in a pathetic way.

The sergeant went into the box stall, picked up the tiny creature, who showed no uneasiness over being handled, and held him gently until he found the milk.

'Nursing in half an hour!' he boasted as the foal drank greedily, swaying awkwardly.

Sometimes he lost his new-found dinner, and Jenny would move over so he could find it readily again. Already she was showing what a good mother she would be.

When he could hold no more, the new foal tumbled down on the straw, exhausted from his labors, and fell sound asleep at once.

An hour later the men roused the drowsy foal and the sergeant carried him out to the scales. Jenny nickered anxiously after them with her head over the box-stall door. The tiny colt wiggled in the man's arms, turned his head toward the mother, and nickered back.

'Gee, he's a dandy!' cried Ben, as he watched the little fellow.

Top Kick

Sergeant Daniels showed his new assistant how to hold his arms around the squirming foal, as he stood on the scales to get the weight of both. Then Ben was weighed again alone and his weight was subtracted from the number of pounds for the two.

'One hundred and twenty-four pounds,' said the sergeant.

Then, standing the foal on his feet, he put a measuring stick beside him.

'Ten hands and one half inch high,' he said.

'How much is that?' asked Ben. 'Pat Corrigan's hand is as big as a ham and twice again as big as mine.'

For a full minute the old sergeant couldn't speak. That any man *lived* who didn't know that horses were measured by 'hands' — !

'Jenny's foal is forty and one half inches tall to you,' he answered sarcastically, spitting accurately at a bucket ten feet away. 'Everybody knows a "hand" means four inches, Corrigan's or anybody else's.'

He measured the distance between the knee and fetlock on the front legs. 'Five inches! Beautiful, beautiful!'

'Five inches what?' asked the green assistant, writing it on a card.

'Cannon bone!' Sergeant Daniels shouted so suddenly that the little foal jumped.

Nobody knew better than he that a loud tone should never be used around animals. The old horseman's face was grim as he put a measuring tape around the small body close to the front legs.

'Thirty-two inches heart girth! What a foal!'

When they took the tiny colt back to the stall, Jenny was still calling him. He answered with an odd little

The New Foal

sound, half-nicker and half-cry. The weighing and measuring business had tired him. He wobbled over to the milk supply again. After getting enough to satisfy himself, he sank on the straw and almost instantly was asleep.

The foal's first day consisted of nickers from Jenny, answered by indrawn breaths or weak nickers, which grew louder each time, and of warm, strength-giving milk and sleep.

The next morning when the men appeared, the new foal was standing up against the warm comfortable side of his mother. Up went his two little ears as he wavered toward the big khaki figure who smelled of tobacco and made comforting sounds.

'Hello, baby!' said the older man. Just then the tiny head went into the pan of grain Ben had brought for Jenny Wren. 'Hey, look out! Do you want to spill it for me?'

As Ben poured the grain into the feed pan, the little fellow stood working his mouth curiously and awkwardly over a few kernels of grain.

'You smart little tyke!' exclaimed the sergeant. 'How did you know that's good horse feed?'

Ben chuckled with delight.

Later when they returned to admire the foal again, the bay mare nuzzled her old friend.

'Yes, Jenny. Coaxing to go out in the sunshine, eh? All right, come on,' the sergeant said, opening the door.

The bay mare started toward the door, but stopped to wait for the foal. With awkward steps he tried to follow her. Nickering softly, she drew him on.

At the doorway the bay colt caught his breath. A soft

Top Kick

cool breeze hit him, and the bright light made him blink his eyes. The sergeant put one arm around his neck and the other on his back to steady him across the cement walk. Then the youngster was on the fresh green grass of the courtyard. Big awkward Ben followed, watching carefully.

The sunshine was warm on his back, but the spring wind was still chilly even in the protected spot behind the stables. First the foal sniffed at the soft ground under his feet and then tried walking about a bit. How clumsy he was! But each step was an improvement. He bobbed his little brush of a tail back and forth excitedly and his movements, though awkward, were quick.

A whinny from the other side of the yard! His mother trotted over to rub noses with Swing-Along, the mare from the next stall, who also had a new foal. With a little squeal Jenny's foal tried to hurry after her. Down he went! He cried out.

'Hey, dumb-bell,' the sergeant called sharply to the new soldier. 'Don't you see Jenny's foal is down on the ground?'

Ben almost fell over his shoes in his haste to get to the foal. He put the frightened youngster on his feet again while the mother trotted up to him, nickering in concern.

'Lead Jenny inside,' ordered the sergeant sharply. 'The foal will follow, but be sure to help him across the walk and through the door. You mustn't let 'em stay out long the first time.'

The next day Sergeant Daniels put a light little halter on the foal's head. The wee fellow didn't seem to mind it at all. He wriggled and twisted as the sergeant fussed with him, but just as though he liked the attention.

The New Foal

'It's this early handling of a foal that's the first step in his education,' the sergeant told Ben. 'For trust in man is the foundation for all horse-training.'

Then the sergeant tried to lead the foal into a paddock, while Ben took Jenny. But the youngster pulled back. Not until his mother was on the other side of the fence, calling to him, and the man was pushing him from behind would the stubborn little one move. Then he actually tried to run toward Jenny and the sergeant had to hold him back so he would not fall. Not a very good halter lesson, perhaps, but the old sergeant's eyes shone as he shut the paddock gate behind him.

The setting of Green Hill Stables was high above the main red-roofed stone buildings of the remount depot. This was a scene familiar to Jenny, but the foal's young eyes had not developed well enough so he could see much beyond the paddock fence. The first day he was a bit timid in the new place and stayed close to his mother's tail. But within a day or two he would duck under her barrel to peek out on the other side and then would go around and around her. Often she could hardly step for fear of knocking him over. Long before he had learned to handle those long gawky legs of his, he tried to jump and landed on his head. Before he could balance at all well, he tried to scratch his head with his hind foot, and over he went in a heap. Jenny Wren's foal was a precocious infant.

The morning that he was four days old, the youngster felt his mother's eagerness as her sharp ears pricked up and she went to the door. He followed her. Voices and strange smells came across the sunny court, and he heard people approaching.

Top Kick

'Now let's see the foal by Gordon Russell out of Jenny Wren. You should have something pretty good to show me,' said a kind voice, a voice which proved its owner to be a real horse-lover.

'Yes, sir!' spoke up Sergeant Daniels. 'I can hardly wait for the colonel to see him, sir.'

Ben trailed along after the group.

'The sire of this foal is the famous Gordon Russell,' explained the commanding officer of Front Royal. 'For a horse to place in thirty races is pretty good, but Gordon Russell won ninety-seven races. Do you wonder he was called the Iron Horse on the tracks?'

'But how did the Army get him?' asked the visitor.

'He was given to us by the Kentucky Racing Association. Some gift, eh? Of course he's a thoroughbred, too.'

'But what of the mare?'

'Oh, Jenny Wren's pedigree never got down on paper, but she's as fine an animal as any cavalryman could want. She has three beautiful gaits, she's easy to handle, and she has the disposition of a lamb.'

'Anything unusual about this foal?' the visitor asked the sergeant.

'Prettiest foal you ever saw, and a smart little tyke, too! Here he is.'

Perhaps the little foal felt Jenny's eagerness, perhaps the excited voice of his friend, the sergeant, caught his ear; or perhaps he inherited the trait of showing off from his famous sire. At any rate he straightened up, stood squarely on his four legs with his head nicely poised, and looked straight at Colonel Whittier with a soft clear gaze from his wide-set eyes.

By this time the foal's wrinkled brown sides had filled

The New Foal

out into a round little body. The dark uncertain color now showed promise of a beautiful bay. The one white foot on those ungainly straight legs pawed impatiently during the inspection, and the white star on his pretty little forehead twinkled as he tossed his head. But his big eyes never left the commanding officer.

'Well, I'll be blowed!' exclaimed the colonel. 'I never saw such a perfect foal.'

Jenny Wren leaned over for the petting she had learned to expect from Colonel Whittier.

'Yes, old girl,' that officer said, rubbing and patting her. 'You've done yourself proud!'

The foal arched his back, gave a little jump and sidled over to Colonel Whittier, his eyes snapping with mischief. The officer put out his hand, wiggling his fingers temptingly.

The youngster went straight to him, nibbled his fingertips, sniffed at his uniform and bit at the gold buttons on his blouse.

Colonel Whittier chuckled and patted him.

'Curiosity is the sign of a smart foal,' he approved.

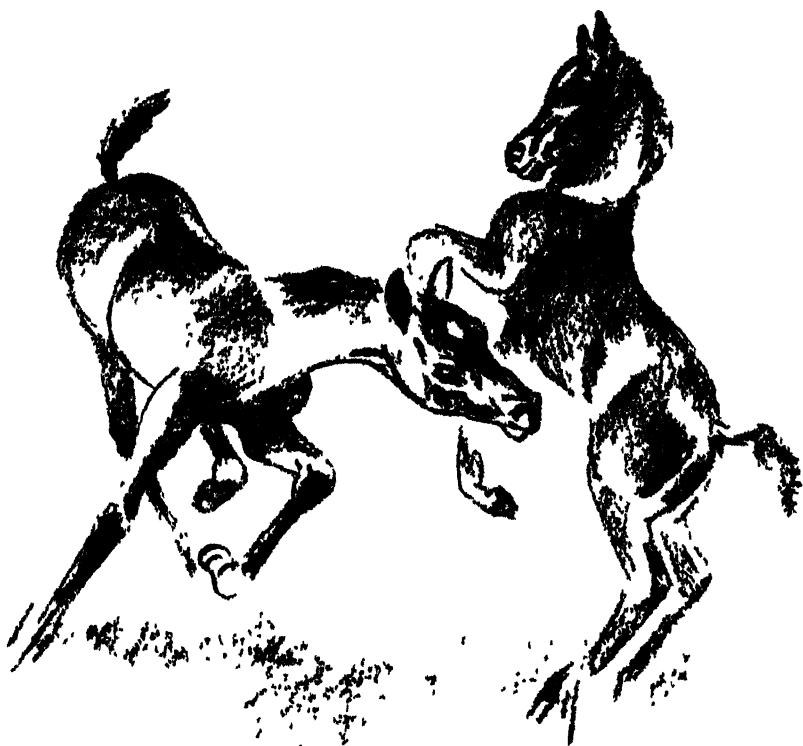
'Nice little fellow,' said the visitor.

'Nice! What do you mean, nice? He's a wonder! He has fine form and bone and promises to have brains, too!' said Colonel Whittier. 'He's a dandy, all right, Sergeant, and he shows good care.'

'Thank you, sir!' said the old sergeant, turning red with pleasure.

Ben grinned from ear to ear.

'When I see a foal like this,' said Colonel Whittier, 'I'd rather be commanding officer of Front Royal Remount Depot than anything else in the world.'



2. THE NAMING OF TOP KICK

EVERY day for a week Jenny and her foal were turned into the paddock. The youngster would run about the enclosure for pure joy. As his eyesight improved, he would sometimes gaze off into the valley or watch the grazing horses on the next hill. A bird call would make him stop and listen. But usually he was active, dodging shadows, tripping over his own feet, or pulling up short at the fence, which he had soon learned could give him a hard bump.

The Naming of Top Kick

Swing-Along and her new filly, Swing-Time, were in the adjoining paddock and Jenny and her foal went over toward them. He jumped up and down to attract attention and poked his small nose through the fence to touch the tiny creature's nose on the other side. How those two young things were drawn to each other!

Toward the end of the week, Jenny and Swing-Along with their foals found themselves in the same paddock. What a day that was! No gazing off to the highway today, but a cautious curiosity for one another, and then what a romp they had while their dams stood side by side, proud mothers comparing their offspring.

So well did the four get along together that the following day the sergeant led a small chestnut foal with a blazed face into their paddock.

'Here's a lonesome baby that needs company,' he said. 'Now, be nice to him!'

The little stranger, who was larger than the others, stood still with no show of friendliness. All he was interested in was the disappearing khaki-colored back of the sergeant. He cried pathetically.

Jenny Wren's foal advanced slowly with a friendly high-pitched nicker. Swing-Time closed in on the other side, offering to rub noses.

But the newcomer was cross and sickly. He had no mother and was losing weight on a diet of cow's milk, lime water, and corn syrup. The blazed-faced youngster just stood and whimpered, and finally, when that brought no attention, he lay down on the ground.

'Oh, why can't you act like the others?' said Ben, running to get him up on his feet.

The orphan rubbed against the man and whimpered

Top Kick

when he left him. Again the other foals made advances while their dams watched.

Suddenly the stranger leaned toward the bay foal, as though to rub noses, and nipped him hard. With a squeal of terror, the little one ran to his mother.

'I'm ashamed of you, you little devil,' said Ben, leading the orphan foal out of the paddock.

At mealtime as Jenny ate her hay, her small foal picked at it, too. When she pushed some of her grain onto the floor, he nibbled at it. So Ben offered hay and grain to the week-old youngster, who accepted it from the first. But his dam's milk was his real nourishment. He would go after it energetically, his short bushy tail bobbing back and forth as he nursed.

One day the farrier appeared. He was the man who had charge of the horseshoeing for the post and knew much about the care of horses' feet.

The little bay foal twisted and turned, but allowed his feet to be picked up and examined. By this time he had been handled so much that it probably never occurred to him to resist.

Ben was curious. 'Aren't you rushing this horseshoeing business?' he asked. 'A tiny foal like this don't need shoes!'

The farrier frowned, but explained patiently. 'The walls of young foals' hoofs grow so fast that we must trim them often to prevent their breaking and to keep their heels level.'

'Gosh!' said Ben. 'Manicures for horses? What next?'

The shoe specialist tried to look at the foal's stance, but the youngster moved constantly.

'Not a thing the matter with this wriggler,' he said

The Naming of Top Kick

finally. He turned to Ben, 'But if he were splay-footed, I should lower the outside walls of his hoofs. If he toed in, I should lower the insides. It's surprising what the early care of the feet will do in the gaits of a horse.'

All the new stableman could do was to whistle his surprise.

'Learning considerable these days, aren't you, Bud?' asked the man kindly. 'The care of horses is a good deal more than just feeding, watering, and grooming them.'

The next morning the little bay foal had a surprise. Instead of going to the paddock as usual, Ben led him after his dam down a slope toward a forty-acre pasture. Swing-Along was at the gate whinnying a welcome. Jenny answered and her foal imitated the sound, cocking his head to one side.

Inside the pasture Swing-Along and little Swing-Time came up to the newcomers in a friendly way. But the other mares were somewhat aggressive as they came to sniff the new foal who huddled against Jenny's big protecting body. Ten pairs of mares and young foals, who were not more than thirty days apart in age, were pastured together. When the dams had satisfied themselves concerning the youngest foal and wandered off, the little fellow could leave the comforting wall of his mother's flanks and investigate his new and exciting surroundings.

Jenny moved on to find better grass and called softly for him to follow. With a whisk of his short tail he stumbled down the slope, falling over the uneven ground and tufts of grass and bumping into trees. He twisted his knees and skinned his nose. But nothing stopped him until he heard a sudden alarming sound.

Top Kick

The little foal stood stock-still, forelegs straight out in front and hind legs bent until his tail almost touched the ground. He panted with fright! Gathering all his strength, he jumped sidewise away from the awful bush.

With a great whirl of wings, out of the green leaves shot a fluffy brown bird. The foal squealed as he hugged the ground. Jenny cantered up to see what was the matter. He ran to her for safety, his eyes still following the streak of feathers.

Although the young foal had learned how to handle his long awkward legs in the paddock, he soon discovered that this hilly pasture required more skill in walking and running. He was clumsy on this rough ground. But he didn't take time to learn gradually. He dashed headlong here and there, sticking his nose into holes, inspecting hummocks and rocks. Even his fright over the bird did not keep Master Curiosity from poking into everything.

In the midst of his fun Jenny called to him. The tiny bay's ears went up. He recognized the dinner call and came running awkwardly toward her, cantering at first and then trotting as he slowed up. He pulled up short beside her with a low whinny.

Evidently Jenny did not approve of nursing right after exercise. She nudged her foal's brown sides until he quieted down and started nibbling the tender spring shoots of grass. Here was another pleasant experience for him — his first taste of young grass. But it did not satisfy his hunger and soon he was begging for milk. At last Jenny allowed him to drink his fill. Tired from all his activity and completely satisfied, he flopped down on a soft clump of old grass for a nap while his mother grazed near-by.

The Naming of Top Kick

That first day Jenny had kept her baby colt away from the other mares and foals. In the days that followed, Swing-Along and Jenny stayed close together while their foals played with one another.

Around and around they chased, head to tail, nipping each other on shoulder and flank. Sometimes they rolled on the ground, kicking up their heels or tickling one another on the chest and in between the front legs. They acted like a pair of puppies.

One afternoon the mares in the pasture with one accord started toward the gate to meet Ben. Even the prospect of mealtime in the comfortable box stall with grain and hay, which they were beginning to enjoy, could not stop the wild capering of the two foals.

'Baby, baby!' called Ben to the youngest foal.

The bay stopped his antics at the sound of that familiar voice. For a moment he hesitated and then started to skip sideways in funny little jumps toward his playfellow, his bright mischievous eyes on the man.

The green assistant laughed heartily and Sergeant Daniels, who had followed him to the pasture, said with a chuckle: 'Comical little scamp, isn't he, with that silly expression on his face. You watch him. He's smart, you mark my words.'

'He likes Swing-Time. They're always together,' said Ben.

'She's a trim little trick. Fast, too; look at her go! Living up to her name, Swing-Time, I guess. Got a carrot in your pocket? Hold it out to Jenny's foal!'

The small colt edged nearer and nibbled at the bright orange object in the man's hand.

'There you are, baby,' said Ben, catching the lively

Top Kick

youngster to take him to the stables. 'Your curiosity got the best of you that time.'

In the days that followed, Jenny's youngster and Swing-Time soon joined in the play of all the foals. Their favorite game was tag, running after one another until the first foal was nipped, when he took after the others. They stood up on their hind legs and pawed each other or rose high in the air and rubbed noses. They romped all day long, with time out only for eating and sleeping. Ben spent as much time as he could watching them and laughing at them.

'You'd think they'd hurt each other,' he said to the sergeant.

'Oh, no! You notice when they get the worst of a tussle they run away. Their legs are nearly as long as their mothers' and get them out of danger in a hurry,' answered Sergeant Daniels.

'But isn't this rough pasture bad for them?'

'Heck, no!' cried the sergeant at this question about his pet theory. 'Tumbles teach them surer footing, and falls scarcely ever hurt them. Those wild races up and down these mountain slopes harden and muscle them so they'll grow up into sound horses.'

One morning when Jenny Wren's foal was two weeks old, he was playing and running with Swing-Time as usual when he heard his mother's sharp neigh. The tone brought him to a sliding stop. His dismayed eyes saw Jenny being led out of the pasture after Sergeant Daniels. He raced to the gate crying after her, but it was closed tight. She kept on calling to him as she went down the slope.

The youngster pushed against the gate, shaking it

The Naming of Top Kick

hard. He looked hard at this obstacle which kept him from his mother. But it was made of good firm boards and was three and a half feet high. Jenny's plaintive whinny came back to him as she disappeared over the hill.

Frantic, he backed away from the gate, sobbing deep in his throat. Suddenly he rushed at the gate and jumped high in the air. Up he went with so much force that his front feet cleared the high top board. But his hind feet struck. He kicked and was free. He was over! He landed squarely on his feet on the other side. In an instant he was tearing down the road after his mother, whimpering as he ran. He caught up with her halfway down the slope.

Ben came puffing up to the surprised sergeant, who had stopped in his tracks. The delight of the mare and her foal as they nuzzled one another, nickering softly, was a touching thing to see.

'He went over the gate!' exclaimed Ben breathlessly. 'Ran at the gate and jumped, that's what he did!'

'Why did you let him?' growled the sergeant. 'He might have been hurt!'

Ben hung his head.

'I told you he was smart. And only two weeks old!' added the sergeant.

'You bet he's smart. He's a top kick, all right,' said Ben, whose eyes twinkled in spite of the reprimand.

'Say, you know, that's a name for him!' said the sergeant. 'Top Kick,' he muttered, rolling the words on his tongue.

'Why not?' asked Ben, delighted with the idea. 'Didn't he kick over the top? But maybe the first sergeants

Top Kick

wouldn't like it. They're supposed to be the "Top Kicks."'

'Well,' said the old man, 'I know in this outfit Sergeant Jones and I would feel it an honor to have such a foal named for us. Top Kick he is!'



3. THE WEANLING

WHEN summer came the flies were annoying, so the mares and foals were kept in the darkened stables in the daytime and put out in the pasture at night. Probably no other pasture would ever give as much pure delight to Top Kick as this one. Rolling, galloping, kicking, and squealing! Romping, playing, nuzzling little Swing-Time and falling asleep by her side! Standing in the dew at dusk with the birds hushed, watching the rabbits

Top Kick

come out to frisk over the mountain slopes, seeing the moonbeams cover the valley with shadows and light up his own special hilltop. But most of all having his patient and affectionate mother, Jenny Wren, always near to run to when in trouble or hungry. Truly a perfect place to grow and develop for five months of the bay foal's life!

'Quite a fine little colt you're getting to be, Mr. Top Kick,' said Ben, who by now had become quite an expert in the care of the mares and their foals. 'No wonder, the way you eat!'

He was feeding Top Kick early one afternoon while Jenny, who was tied, looked on with drowsy, hungry eyes. She would have to wait another half-hour for her supper.

'Three quarts of rolled oats twice a day, to say nothing of the timothy and alfalfa you stuff into you,' he teased, patting the round sleek brown sides of the foal. But nothing could distract Top Kick.

The soldier paused outside the door for a moment, looking at Top Kick's record under its celluloid cover.

'Twelve hands and one inch,' he read aloud. 'That's you at three months old, Top Kick,' he said with pride. 'Three hundred and eighty-nine pounds, forty-nine inches heart girth, and six and a quarter inches cannon bone. And you've grown almost as much again in the last two months.'

The little orphan must have heard his voice, for he came romping across the court. He almost knocked Ben down as he slid into him.

'Be careful, there!' he said. 'That was cute enough when you were little, but you're a big boy now. You've got to learn not to be so rough.'

The Weanling

The pet of the stables sat down on his hind quarters like a dog and offered his forefoot to shake hands. Top Kick, who had finished his grain, stared over the closed half of the door.

Ben laughed. 'Coaxing for sugar, are you? Well, I haven't any, only good substantial grain for youngsters like you.'

The orphan stood on his hind legs and attempted to kiss the man.

'Get down, you little devil. You're a nuisance!' he said emphatically, but he could not make his voice as harsh as his words.

A man and his wife, escorted by a soldier from the office, came across the court. They were delighted with the youngster's antics. The soldier told them the story of the little orphan.

'Yes, sir,' he said, 'at first he lost all the time, but in three months he doubled his weight.'

'Does he still drink milk?' the lady asked.

'Six quarts of cow's milk a day and all the grain and hay he'll eat,' he answered.

'But doesn't he make himself sick by overeating? Horses do, I've heard.'

'That's a funny thing,' said Ben importantly. 'A grown horse will overeat, but a youngster won't.'

'When will you wean him?' the visitor asked.

'He should have been weaned before this,' was the reply. 'But he's not quite up to normal. He's got thin knees and small cannon bones. But he's bright if he isn't perfect physically. Want to see some of his tricks? Shake hands,' commanded Ben. The foal performed the stunt with gusto.

Top Kick

'Lie down, Beelzebub,' said the man. 'We named him Beelzebub because he's such a little devil.'

'Lie down,' he repeated.

The blaze-faced little colt, standing well up toward Ben's shoulders, arched his neck, bent one leg, and sank to his knees. Then he swung his weight to the opposite side until he fell over, stretching his legs. But all the time he kept his eyes on the man in khaki.

'He's asking for sugar,' laughed Ben.

'Here's some,' said the lady. 'I never visit the stables without sugar in my purse.'

After Beelzebub had been rewarded for his trick, he kept pushing his soft muzzle toward his soldier friend.

'All right,' said Ben in mock exasperation, sitting down beside him. 'Kiss me!'

The muzzle went straight to his mouth. The youngster received another lump of sugar.

'We'd teach him more tricks, but he keeps bothering us when we're working,' explained Ben. 'He kept crying in the pasture, so we let him stay in the stables. We leave his box stall open and he goes in and out as he likes. But it's tough on the little beggar not having a mammy. We've all made a pet of him, and we'll miss him when he goes to the weanling barn.'

As they crossed the court, Beelzebub followed like a dog. Jenny Wren and Top Kick watched until they disappeared. Soon it would be four o'clock — time to go to the pasture, where they would stay until breakfast time.

A week later Jenny and her youngster, as well as all the other mares and foals who had been their companions, were led in the opposite direction from the pasture. Down a new road over a knoll and toward a group of

The Weanling

red-roofed buildings on a side hill they went. Funny business, this! But Top Kick was full of curiosity. His eyes were bright and he kicked up his heels. As he tried to see everything at once, he pulled so hard on his head-piece that Ben could scarcely hold him.

Finally they arrived at the veterinary hospital. Pair after pair of mare and foal disappeared inside the building.

'This is nothing to worry you,' the veterinary officer said to Jenny and Top Kick, when their turn came. 'Just a spray to be sure you're clean before you go to new stables.'

Top Kick disliked the sound of the spraying machine and he twisted and turned to get away from it. The officer's low voice and the calmness of Jenny helped to quiet the youngster.

Then they went down the hill to stables west of headquarters, a good mile and a half from their old home. The Green Hill stables had been rows of stalls, forming a square with a court in the center; but these stables were long with rows of box stalls on each side and a wide aisle between them. A big good-natured corporal with a ready laugh greeted them.

'I hear you're going to work in this stable,' he said to Ben. The big soldier nodded with an awkward grin.

'Looks like a dandy bunch of youngsters!' added the corporal. 'Which mare stays?'

'Jenny Wren,' said Ben, petting her. 'Her foal is the youngest of the lot.'

'Whew!' exclaimed Corporal Brown. 'Some of these foals look nearer yearlings than weanlings. Sure you haven't any older than six months?'

Top Kick

'Dead sure,' laughed Ben. 'All except Beelzebub. He's older.'

As they talked, the men began putting the mares and foals in the box stalls, but immediately led the mares out.

What a commotion there was! As soon as the youngsters realized that their dams were actually going away without them, they whinnied as loud as they could. The mares, distressed over leaving their foals, whinnied back. But they didn't return, and the weanlings (after the separation the foals are called weanlings) paced the stalls, pounded on the sides, cried piteously and called and called. Only Jenny Wren of all the ten mares had remained with her foal. Top Kick, troubled by the turmoil about him, whimpered, too.

All day the weanlings were restless and uneasy, going around and around in their new stalls, whinnying and crying for their mothers. Feeding time helped many to forget their loneliness, but some refused grain and hay entirely. But by the time Ben put the second meal before them, the worst was over.

The weanlings were kept in their new stables for several days to get accustomed to their surroundings. Jenny Wren and Top Kick found the floor of their stall was good fresh clay, which felt pleasant to their feet, and was much better for them than hard floors.

Corporal Brown watched his new family carefully and talked to the weanlings to pacify them. Ben, knowing each foal so well, moved from one stall to another constantly, petting the forlorn little things.

On the second day the corporal said, 'They're ready to go to pasture, now, they're calmed down so well.'

'What about the mares?' asked Ben.

The Weanling

'Oh, they're kicking up a fuss, too,' said the corporal. 'Swing-Along has been pacing back and forth beside the fence, until in one night it looks like a racetrack.'

'Poor Swing-Along! There's always some of 'em feel the separation more than others,' said Ben.

'Now take Jenny Wren and her foal out with the bell mare first,' directed the corporal.

'Bell mare?' asked Ben.

'Oh, yes, you have to have either an old mare or a gelding at this stable to run with the weanlings to show them how to behave. But the first week we also keep a mare that the youngsters know.'

Out to the pasture Ben led the two mares and Top Kick. Then one by one the weanlings were put through the gate. The first was Swing-Time, who cried every step of the way for Swing-Along. But Jenny Wren called reassuringly and the little filly galloped to her and Top Kick, relieved to find old friends.

The others were not so easily settled. They whinnied and called, nickered and sobbed deep in their throats. They dashed madly back and forth without watching where they stepped. One fell headlong into the gate. But the bell mare went around and around the group, and Jenny kept answering their calls, until one by one they quieted down.

After a week the youngsters, including Top Kick, were familiar with the new pasture. They learned where the fences were — sometimes from having bumped into them — the location of the watering-troughs and of the salt mixture.

Top Kick seemed to appreciate his dam as never before. In this week in the new pasture he scarcely left her

Top Kick

side. When Swing-Time came toward Jenny as if she'd like a drink of milk, too, his hind feet flew out in a sudden show of temper against his old playmate. In the stalls he cuddled up as close to that good old back as he could, before he felt secure enough to sleep.

'Clever little colt!' said Ben. 'I'll bet you know you'll be separated from Jenny soon.'

Then the awful day arrived. Jenny and Top Kick had just finished eating their breakfast when Ben led the mare out of the stall.

'Sorry, baby,' he said sympathetically. 'Your mother has to go back to Green Hill.'

Top Kick automatically turned from his feed box and crowded after his dam and the man. But the door snapped shut in front of him! In consternation he saw his mother leaving him, calling to him to follow. The door was strong and held firmly. He seemed to realize what was happening.

A cry arose in his throat, a cry like that of a human being in distress. Then he stood quietly, making no sound, his front feet outspread, his eyes big with terror.

For a moment Ben paused. All was quiet as the bewildered baby colt, panic-stricken and breathing hard, watched through the cracks of his door. Jenny turned back toward Top Kick and nickered piteously.

That call spurred the foal into action. He pounded against the door. It did not give an inch. His agonized glance went to the five-foot wooden wall which was the side of the box stall, the barrier which kept him from his mother. He backed away from it. And then a last whinny from her from outside the stable!

He backed up farther into the corner. Suddenly he

The Weanling

plunged toward the wall, leaping high. His front feet cleared the top, but his hind legs struck hard, toppling him over on his head. He fell heavily, the breath knocked out of him. But he was outside the stall. Painfully but quickly he scrambled to his feet. With blood streaming down his legs he ran crookedly down the alley of the stable, nickering after Jenny.

Ben met the forlorn little creature. 'Poor little Top Kick!' he said tenderly.

'Get a van as quick as you can!' the corporal ordered, as he came running.

Ben's concern over the injured animal was so great he scarcely heard the tirade of words that followed. All he knew was that it was all his fault.

In the veterinary hospital the corporal's leathery face was stern and Ben's was drawn with pity as the lieutenant cleaned and dressed the wounds. Top Kick seemed dazed by what had happened.

'In all my life I never saw a foal go over the top of a box stall. How he ever did it, I still don't understand,' the corporal said.

'He's a jumping fool, I guess,' ventured Ben. 'He jumped the pasture gate when he was only two weeks old.'

'He's got the right build and enough determination to make a good hunter if all these injuries don't finish him,' said the officer.

'Are they that bad?' asked Ben in a husky voice. 'Won't his legs get all right again?'

'Yes, they're bad,' said the corporal. 'He may have ruined himself for good!'



4. THE GHOST HORSE

TOP KICK had to remain in a veterinary hospital box stall for several weeks. He was uneasy and restless.

The lieutenant himself dressed his wounds and often stayed with him at feeding time. Ben came to visit him every day. As they talked to him quietly, rubbing the spot between his ears, the small bay colt seemed to forget his troubles and would eat better. Top Kick was learning confidence in men, even when he was an invalid.

The Ghost Horse

One day the officer said, 'I'm afraid your legs will get stiff, Top Kick, if we keep you here any longer.' To his assistant he added: 'Take him to the weanling stables. His wounds have healed remarkably well.'

The corporal was delighted at the return of the little colt, whom he had bragged about ever since the accident. Ben's joy was great, as he had worried much over the injured creature. But Top Kick fretted in the confinement of the weanling stables. He was changed to a larger box stall, but even that didn't seem to help.

'Top Kick, I don't know whether you're fussing because your legs hurt or because you're lonely for your mammy,' Ben said, as he exercised the bay weanling up and down the yard. Top Kick lifted his feet high in a funny way, because of the bandages on his legs. 'You don't eat much, you don't sleep well, and you're always listening for every sound.'

The following afternoon was sunny and pleasant, so he led Top Kick to the pasture with the rest of the weanlings. Swing-Time nuzzled the new arrival, while the others galloped away over the knoll.

But Top Kick paid no attention to his old playmate. He stood for an instant, sniffing the air and looking away toward the mare stables. With a snort, he tore along the fence to the east. His bandaged legs were forgotten as he raced over the ground, neighing loudly.

Not until he crashed into the fence at the end of the pasture did he stop. Head up, feet outspread, and tail flowing out behind him, he called and called. Top Kick had not forgotten his mother.

He paced back and forth along the fence with his

Top Kick

eyes fixed on the hill where his old home was. He continued to neigh, stopping at intervals to listen for an answer.

Top Kick kept this up until it was dusk. The birds twittered softly in the trees, chirping insects were quiet, and a sweet peacefulness settled down on the pasture. But Top Kick could not be content. Finally, as he saw a khaki figure coming up the hill toward him in the gathering darkness, a little sound came up in his throat and grew into a last clear neigh for Jenny Wren.

Then he heard it! His ears pricked up, his nostrils quivered, and every inch of him was alert, listening to that sound. There it came again!

And so Ben found him.

'Top Kick, what do you hear? Your mother couldn't call to you from her stable.'

The bay weanling willingly followed the man on the way to the stables. But he kept looking back over his shoulder. An answer to his call had surely come across the hills, but so faintly that even his quick ear could not be certain it came from Jenny Wren.

Although Top Kick was quieter and whinnied less, he was still uneasy in his stall.

'He needs more exercise,' said the veterinarian the next morning, as he put new dressings on the wounds. 'Let him stay out in the pasture all night. His legs are doing nicely, and a good romp with the other weanlings will do him good.'

At four o'clock, Top Kick was at the east end of the pasture again. Swing-Time had followed him and kept him company. Later the rest of the weanlings came galloping over the hill to see what interested these two.

The Ghost Horse

Top Kick stood looking across the ravine while Swing-Time stood quietly beside him, her neck across his.

This was no way to spend a sunny afternoon. This was the time to play! Around and around went the band of youngsters, jumping, chasing, squealing, and romping. Swing-Time finally joined in the fun, nickering to Top Kick to follow. But although he watched them with bright eyes, he would not leave the fence.

At last the weanlings wandered over the knoll again, with the bell mare following sedately after them. Top Kick was left alone.

Toward dusk the bay colt called across the hills again. A faint neigh came back to him.

Head held high, tail raised, Top Kick stood listening, his whole body trembling with excitement. When the sound was not repeated, Top Kick whinnied again — a pleading cry! And again came the answer, but so feebly that he could not be sure that it was Jenny Wren's neigh.

Then over the hill in the moonlight came Beelzebub, the oldest youngster in the band, the big chestnut with long legs that ran swiftly over the ground with no apparent effort. He was a handsome creature, but he had a vicious temper, and all the other weanlings had learned to avoid him.

Top Kick had had experience with this tyrant before. Again and again he had run to Jenny for protection against the wicked heels, the cruel teeth, and striking forefeet of Beelzebub. Now his calls had attracted the chestnut, who, being cut off from the company of the weanling band, came dashing up to tease Top Kick.

The bay weanling was afraid of Beelzebub. And no

Top Kick

mother near to protect him! A sob rose in his throat. It grew until it burst forth, a loud, piercing cry for help.

Provoked by that call, Beelzebub's eyes flashed. Up flew his wicked heels!

In the six months of his life, Top Kick had shown very little temper. But to be cruelly kicked without cause was too much. Quick as a flash he plunged at the chestnut, biting him on the rump before he could guard himself. And then a real fight was on.

Beelzebub reared high in the air, squealed and struck. Top Kick dodged, wheeled, and let go with both hind feet. Away Top Kick flew, calling again to his mother for help, with Beelzebub in hot pursuit. He was caught! Top Kick felt sharp teeth go into his tail and he shrieked at his opponent. His feet flew out, catching Beelzebub on the jaw. Infuriated, the chestnut slashed out viciously again. Top Kick dodged and ran as fast as he could up the hill.

Breathless from the climb, the bay colt paused for an instant and saw Beelzebub plunging toward him. Like a clarion call went his cry of distress over the hills.

His feet shot out, but Beelzebub was untouched and leaped at him from the other side. Top Kick turned quickly, his foot slipped on a stone. He was down! The chestnut jumped at him, kicking and biting. With the wind knocked out of him, Top Kick was in a serious situation. He was completely at the mercy of the demon weanling!

The sound of heavy hoofs hitting the ground sharply! Beelzebub hesitated an instant, then renewed the attack. Top Kick, struggling to rise, was knocked flat again.

Hoofbeats skidded to a stop. A reprimanding squeal

The Ghost Horse

of a grown horse! Beelzebub was knocked away from his victim. Sharp teeth bit his rump. He fled squealing.

When the little bay colt staggered to his feet, he found it was not Jenny who had rescued him, but the old bell mare. He trotted painfully beside her as she led him back toward the weanling band.

But Top Kick did not want to play. He was tired from his fight. His wounds hurt. The old bell mare was indifferent to his condition and took no time to pamper him. Forlorn and more lonely than ever for his mother, he slipped back to the slope by the east fence where he had heard that answering neigh.

There in the moonlight stood an old white horse with hanging lower lip, a big hollow in his back and scanty tail and mane. But kindness and intelligence shone in his old eyes. He whinnied a friendly greeting.

Top Kick hesitated. But the white horse looked companionable, and the poor little colt needed comfort. Slowly the youngster advanced. They touched noses. That ancient muzzle was as soft as silk. The old horse nickered.

Top Kick must have recognized the ally who had been answering his calls. He buried his head in that soft white neck.

All night long, Top Kick and the old white horse stayed together. After nuzzling each other for some time, they nibbled grass side by side. The old horse could find the sweetest tufts in the pasture and called to Top Kick to share them. Toward morning it grew cold and breezy, and he led the young bay to a place where the side of the hill and a clump of trees formed a wind-break.

Top Kick

They stayed in the protected spot until daybreak, standing close together with Top Kick's head on the white horse's neck in perfect contentment. But as the faint glow of the sunrise crept up over the mountain, the old horse grew uneasy and wandered toward the fence. Top Kick followed, nickering softly.

Along the wire, rails, and posts the old horse went until he found a place where the top rail was missing. He turned back to Top Kick, nuzzling him a moment. Then he gathered himself together, galloped toward the low place, and jumped the fence. Top Kick's eyes grew big as he watched. With another reassuring nicker as he looked back over his shoulder, the old horse trotted down over the next hill.

When the corporal and his men opened the gate to lead the weanlings to the stable, Top Kick and Swing-Time came running to go to their stalls for breakfast.

'See how fine Top Kick is this morning, Corporal,' said Ben, hitching up his breeches. 'He's forgetting his loneliness for Jenny.'

As Corporal Brown took his halter to lead him, he exclaimed: 'Top Kick's been hurt! Look, Ben, there's blood on his back and sides. Hoof and teeth marks or I'm a sinner!'

'I'll bet it's Beelzebub,' said Ben.

'That Beelzebub is a devil if ever there was one,' added the corporal. 'Never before have I seen a youngster so mean that he couldn't run with the weanling band.'

But when Beelzebub was led into the stable, he was a meek and quiet little colt.

'He seems to have got the worst of it, after all,' said Ben.

The Ghost Horse

'That's funny!' exclaimed the corporal. 'Top Kick is so much smaller. The bell mare must have taken a hand.'

It was decided that Top Kick and Beelzebub should remain in their stalls for a few days until their wounds healed.

During the day, a sergeant from another stable came in to see about halter-shanks.

'You may think your weanlings are fine, but you ought to see my bunch,' he said.

'Old worn-out nags with their lives behind them!' teased the corporal.

'The retired horses are the smart ones,' insisted the sergeant. 'Take old Storm King for instance. He's thirty-five years old. He carried General Blasingame throughout the World War, then he was used by the master of hounds at Fort Leavenworth and jumped like a deer until at thirty years old he strained a tendon. So now he's retired by War Department order.'

'That old crow-bait is no good to himself or anyone else!' said Corporal Brown.

'Well, he was out in the pasture last night and at the gate this morning as usual. But the gates to the next two pastures were open. That old son-of-a-gun can open a gate.'

'What of it?' asked the corporal.

'I'm just telling you how smart he is. He'll turn on a water spigot, too, and he drinks right from the stream of water as it comes out. He just wanted a bigger place to roam in, that's all.'

'I was on duty last night,' put in Ben. 'I thought I heard a rumpus in the pasture and ran to look. There in

Top Kick

the moonlight on the hill was a white horse with Top Kick.'

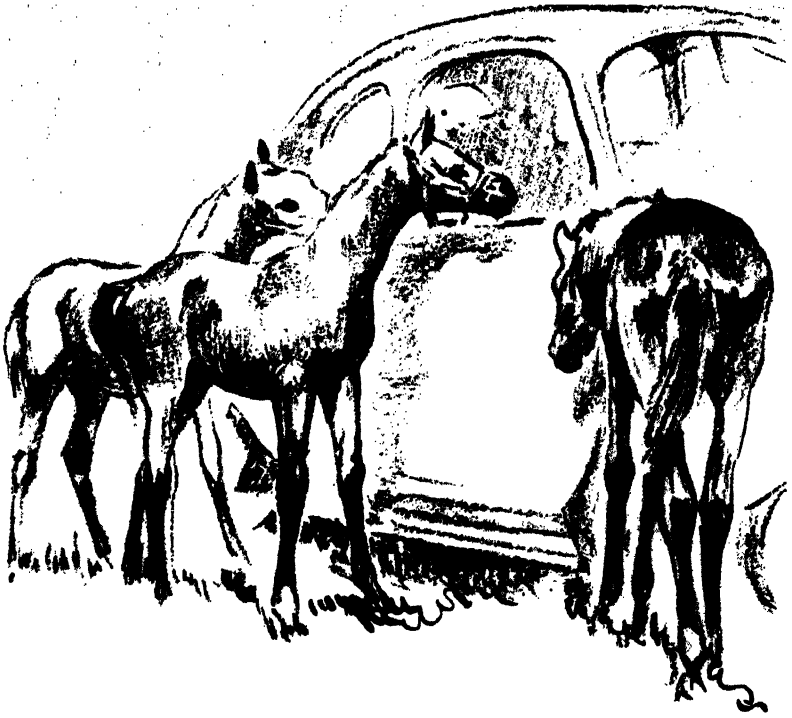
'White horse? There's no white horse in that pasture nor anywhere near. Boy, you're seeing things!'

'But remember the open gates,' said the sergeant.

'Storm King?' asked Corporal Brown incredulously. 'Why, he's half a mile away, and even if he got through the gates he'd have two fences to jump!'

'Apple sauce! No old nag could clear those fences, and you know it. Ben just saw a ghost, that's all.'

But Top Kick in his stall was whinnying for Storm King.



5. STORM KING TO THE RESCUE

A FEW days later, Top Kick was back in the pasture again, and Swing-Time coaxed him into a wild romp with the rest of the weanlings. Toward sundown, dark clouds scudded across the sky and a threatening wind sprang up. The entire band grew uneasy, and the bell horse could not quiet the youngsters.

Top Kick looked at the signs of storm with big eyes. As his fear grew, he slipped away from the others and stationed himself at the east fence. Whinny after whinny went across the hills, as he paced restlessly back and forth.

Top Kick

The bay weanling had never seen an electric storm. He and Jenny had been kept in the stable when it looked like rain, and since his arrival at the weanling stables the weather had been unusually dry.

As flashes shot across the black dome above him, lighting the hills, Top Kick knew real terror. Brighter and brighter came the lightning. Suddenly after a dazzling flash, the sky roared. Poor little Top Kick! He must have thought his world was coming to an end. He trembled all over and his legs straddled out so that his body almost touched the ground. Another blaze of light! Another mighty burst of sound! Then the sky opened and rain beat down upon him, pelting him unmercifully. Crying in distress, he dashed one way and then another as he tried to get away from the storm.

Then out of the darkness came a comforting whinny. Through the rain came a form which shone white in a flash of lightning. Storm King was looking for him.

Top Kick ran to his friend, nuzzling him with relief. An angry roar of thunder made him flatten himself against that wet warm body, and a sound gurgled in his throat. A calming nicker from Storm King lessened his fright. Then the old horse led his protégé to the natural windbreak between the trees and the hill. There they stayed close together, heads down, tails drooping, while the water poured upon them.

When the storm was over and the moon came out, making the fresh-washed hills almost as light as day, Storm King left their partial shelter to get some exercise. He galloped ponderously over the rough ground, sure-footed and dignified, and with a smoothness that reflected the old skill with which he had made his enviable

Storm King to the Rescue

war record. The little colt saw only that his comrade was leaving him, so he tore after him in a panic.

Storm King waited for him beyond the hill with playing legs and bent head, coaxing Top Kick to play. The bay dashed up and pulled the white mane as an invitation to be chased. Back and forth they raced. Around and around they ran.

The fresh smell of grass after the rain, the cool night air and this romping with a gay young thing seemed to put new life into Storm King. He made a delicate little sound of pleasure in his throat, and he nickered gaily but insistently when Top Kick ran too far away.

At last Beelzebub appeared over the knoll and tried to join in the fun. When he ran along with Top Kick or Storm King, they paid no attention to him. But if he came too near, Storm King's ears would go back and his happy nicker changed to a snort of warning. At last the lonely tyrant simply stood and watched the antics of the others. He could not dispute Storm King's authority.

Suddenly an owl hooted. The moon went under a cloud. Top Kick ran to Storm King in mock alarm. He rubbed his nose, caressed his neck, and nipped him fondly with his teeth. The big old white horse returned his affection in the same way.

After their coats had been drenched with rain and steamed by exercise, Storm King found an old tree-trunk which had a good rubbing surface. He showed the weanling how to press his neck and sides against it to get a good massage. Top Kick followed his example. That old rubbing tree was a favorite place for the bay colt as long as he stayed in that pasture.

When the first light of morning came over the moun-

Top Kick

tain, Storm King lifted his head from the tufts of grass they were eating and trotted toward the east fence. With a sudden bound, he was over it and off down the hill.

Nearly every night after that, Storm King came to the weanling pasture to be with Top Kick. Ben caught sight of the white horse several times, but he said nothing about it. Ghost horse, eh?

By day, the corporal and his men handled and groomed the weanlings, so Top Kick did not miss the old horse when he was in the stable. He enjoyed the grooming as much as a cat likes to have its fur stroked, but he could not hold still while the brush went over his sleek body. He wriggled and twisted, nipped Ben playfully and pulled his grooming cloth out of his pocket. Yet he always nuzzled him for more when he had finished.

'You're a rascal,' Ben said affectionately and gave him an extra rubdown. He helped to groom the other weanlings, but managed to reserve full care of Top Kick himself. No other colt in the group had so much loving care.

The youngsters' feet were picked up and cleaned regularly, and the horseshoer called whenever hoofs needed rasping, lest uneven hoofs or broken hoof walls throw the colts' weight out of balance and make them lame and footsore. Top Kick was so active it was always a real job to check up on his feet. But he was so trusting and friendly that everybody who handled him enjoyed him.

Fall came, and the trees on the hillsides flamed into color and the grass turned brown. As the nights grew chilly, Top Kick was not always joined by his old white friend. When it was very cold, Storm King was blanketed and kept in his stable. The colt had to seek out

Storm King to the Rescue

Swing-Time or some of the other weanlings for companionship.

After the first of January all the weanlings were considered yearlings, so Top Kick was but nine months old when he found himself in the yearling stables. His box stall was large and roomy, and the bedding straw was thick and comfortable. The grain was excellent, and the hay was sweet-tasting. Ben, who had gone to the colonel for permission to work in this barn, went from one animal to another, and his voice should have quieted Top Kick. But the bay colt was nervous and, although he made no sound, he moved about constantly.

After a few days, Ben led the colts of the yearling stables to a near-by pasture one by one. How they raced over the hillside, squealing and kicking up their heels! Top Kick's feet fairly flew over the ground. His sharp eyes were watching for Swing-Time, the little filly he liked so well. But he did not find her — the fillies and colts had been placed in separate pastures.

When the tender shoots of grass started up on the brown pasture, soft warm breezes blew and songbirds returned, the yearling band must have known that spring had come. They raced and romped over the hill-sides with high spirits and boundless energy.

Of them all, Ben saw to it that none was better groomed than Top Kick, with his sleek glossy coat shining like polished gold, his mane flowing like a streamer, and his tail held high like a plume.

The yearlings played in a big sandpile on the side of a hill, tumbling and rolling in it with many wild romps and races. With their capers, a new grace and ease of movement were beginning to develop. Yet at times their

Top Kick

ways were quite reserved and adult. The youngsters were growing up.

Sometimes the colts met other animals. They had learned to know the bobbing little cottontails who scurried across the pasture or played on the hillside at dusk. One day Top Kick's curiosity led him to investigate a small black furry creature with a stripe down his back, who had stopped on his way across the pasture to dig for grubs. Top Kick came up so quietly that the animal did not know he was near until he heard him snort close at hand. He started violently, turned suddenly, and poor little Top Kick received a shower which sent him scampering away with such a bad odor in his sensitive nostrils that he was actually sick.

'Top Kick, what a mess you're in!' exclaimed Ben as he gave a special bath to the wretched colt. 'You're a regular Nosy Parker, that's what you are! But I guess a skunk is one animal you'll leave strictly alone after this.'

Ever afterward the faintest whiff of the offensive odor would set Top Kick to quivering, and if possible he would get away from that smell as fast as he could. But his curiosity got him into more and more mischief.

One day a car drove through the gate and into the colt's pasture. While the bay colt watched from a knoll, several men sprang out of the vehicle and went into the yearling stables. Top Kick looked intently at this shining thing that glistened with new paint. Slowly he went toward it. The other yearlings joined him. They circled the car several times. Cautiously they drew in closer and closer.

The automobile did not move. It did not run. It simply stood there.

Storm King to the Rescue

Top Kick was the first to touch it. He nosed a bright headlight; he caught the odd gasoline smell and moved back to the gleaming top. Sticking his head through an open window, he pushed the soft cushions with his nose. He sniffed. It smelled good. He gave the car seat a hard nip. But it did not give way to his sharp teeth.

As he drew his head out of the window, the other yearlings were falling pell-mell over each other in their excitement. But they soon lost their fear and followed Top Kick as he licked the freshly painted surface, nicked the metal with his teeth, and bit the soft rubber of the tires. They stood with forefeet on the running-board, and very thoroughly did they investigate this funny plaything left in their pasture.

Suddenly the colts saw the corporal with the visitors come out of the stable. The other youngsters scampered away, but Top Kick was behind the car, his sharp teeth tearing the canvas cover off the spare tire. As the men ran up, he looked at them solemnly out of his big brown eyes, a great piece of the fabric still in his mouth.

'You devil!' scolded Corporal Brown, laughing in spite of himself. 'You're responsible for all this!' But he did not laugh as he reprimanded Ben for being out of the place and letting the colts get into mischief. His sharp tone sent Top Kick scampering up the hill after the others.

'That fat farmer knew so much about colts!' grumbled Ben as he fed Top Kick that evening. 'He tried to tell us how to raise them, but he didn't have sense enough to leave his car outside the gate.'

Top Kick nuzzled his friend as if asking forgiveness for getting him into trouble.

Top Kick

When warmer weather came, the colts again found themselves in the stable during the day and in the pasture at night.

'Looking for your ghost horse again, aren't you?' the understanding Ben asked Top Kick. On moonlight nights especially the bay colt would whinny across the hills toward the retired horses stables in a greeting to his old friend, Storm King.

One night, when a full moon made the hill a gay playground, the yearlings were romping back and forth in a lively game of tag. All at once the entire band stopped in their tracks, for among them, right at their heels, was a jumping ill-tempered creature that bit savagely at any of the colts within reach.

In a flash the yearlings whirled and ran helter-skelter away from this beast that threatened them. As it raced after the flying hoofs, nipping the slower ones, the big black mongrel dog broke into a wild barking which frightened the poor colts more than ever.

The entire band was thrown into a panic. The colts tore madly in one direction until the fence stopped them for an instant, when their heels flew out at the tormentor; then away they dashed in the other direction. Had the chase lasted only a short time, the damage would not have been great. But, as their terror grew, the panic-stricken colts bruised themselves on the fences, bumped each other, and fell heavily on the rough ground.

Top Kick was more agile than the others and had no difficulty in keeping away from the barking animal. But he was so excited that his skin twitched and his hair actually stood on end. Suddenly his foot went into a rabbit hole and down he went. He rolled over, but



Top Kick

jumped up almost as soon as he touched the ground, so quick was he on his feet. But the delay had given the dog the chance to grab him. Top Kick cried out as the cruel teeth sank into his shoulder. He floundered in an attempt to get loose. But the dog held tight. Poor Top Kick's life was in danger!

Suddenly up the hill galloped a white form, snorting defiance. The startled dog loosened his grip. Whirling, the colt struck the dog with his forefeet. But Top Kick was not accustomed to fighting such an enemy. The dog was circling him again when Storm King arrived.

A savage gleam shone in the old eyes as the big horse thundered up. With a scream of fury he dashed at the dog, showing hard cruel teeth that Top Kick had never seen behind that soft old muzzle. The dog tried to escape, but so fierce was the attack that he could not get away. He was forced to fight it out with the veteran warhorse.

Storm King struck savagely at the dog as it ran in and out between his flying hoofs. The big horse jumped and plunged at the savage creature. He tossed his head from side to side. The dog backed away snapping. In the repeated sallies, Storm King pushed him into a corner of the fence. Then down came the forelegs in a powerful thrust.

The black dog lay still. For an instant the old horse looked down at him. Then he drew a deep breath as though weary, and slowly and painfully trotted over to Top Kick, nuzzling him affectionately. The rest of the night Storm King spent in rounding up the yearling band and staying close to all the frightened injured colts. But when morning came the old horse had gone.

Storm King to the Rescue

As the corporal surveyed the damage that would take weeks of care, medicine, and dressings to cure, he could not find words strong enough to hurl at the soldier who had been on guard, but who had not heard the commotion.

When the dead body of the black dog was found, a big group of men collected.

'It's that mean sheep-killer the whole countryside's been after,' said one.

'No yearling killed that big brute!' exclaimed another.

'Look, here's a hoofprint! A big horse! Say, how do you figure that out?'

The corporal scratched his chin. 'It beats me. What grown horse — and a big fellow, too, by the size of that hoofprint — could have been there to kill that dog?'

Suddenly his eyes fell on his assistant. 'Well, Ben, I guess it's your ghost horse again. He came to help Top Kick and the rest of the colts when he was needed. And he saved your skin, too, don't forget that. If this dog had killed some of 'em your name would sure be Mud.'

For some time afterward, whenever dogs barked away down the valley or on the highway, every one of the thirty yearlings trembled and looked with frightened eyes in the direction from which the sound came. It was a long, long time before Top Kick could learn to trust any dog.



6. TOP KICK IS RIDDEN

THE bay colt was beginning to look like an adult horse! He had not yet reached his full growth, but he held himself proudly, his lovely keen-looking head up, his long mane and tail flowing and his coat glistening. He moved smoothly and sweepingly over the ground and had become as sure-footed as a mountain goat on the Front Royal hills. He was a delight to all who saw him.

'Gordon Russell's colt,' they bragged. 'He takes after his grand old sire!'

Top Kick Is Ridden

In the fall of his third year, Top Kick found himself in the training stables close to headquarters. Here he saw more activity outside his window than ever before: feed wagons going to and from the grain elevator, new horses coming in from long trips, and others being inspected before shipment to army posts and National Guard units. For the raising of horses is a minor activity of the Army Remount Service compared with its duty of caring for and lending stallions to farmers and breeders, and the purchase and training of horses for use in the Army.

That first night was rainy, and the bay colt was uneasy over the lightning flashes and thunderclaps. He moved about nervously. Suddenly into his feed box sprang a small gray animal, purring loudly. Top Kick reared in fright. But the half-grown cat stayed quietly where he was, and Top Kick was an inquisitive colt. At last he gingerly put his muzzle on the gray fur. The cat arched her back and rubbed against his nose. The storm was forgotten as Top Kick made the acquaintance of Tabby. Later, when he settled down for the night, the gray cat curled up against him and slept there until morning. Odd how so small a stablemate could make a restless colt contented in new quarters!

The training sergeant, bright-eyed and keen, had been at Front Royal for over twenty years and knew how to make friends with his colts. Top Kick, after being in his stable for a time, accepted him half-heartedly.

'Time to start training lessons,' said the sergeant one day, and he showed the colt a cavesson. This was a halter with a metal ring in the middle of the noseband. Top Kick sniffed it dubiously.

Top Kick

'Don't you like this, Top Kick?' asked Sergeant John as he buckled it on the colt's head.

Top Kick shook his head. The man laughed. But the colt was merely testing the weight on his nose.

As Sergeant John led the frisky animal, who side-stepped mischievously over the ground, he said: 'Calm down, Top Kick. You've got to work now.'

When they reached the training hall, he snapped a long rein into the cavesson ring. 'Stop your foolishness!' he said sharply to the jiggling colt.

The new contraption on his head worried Top Kick. He frantically looked around, but the big building with its soft tanbark floor was empty except for the sergeant, his assistant, and himself. No, there was Tabby at the window. She must have followed her friend and hopped up on the sill. The colt's ears perked up as he saw her.

When the strange soldier tried to lead Top Kick, he held back. But with the man at his shoulder and the cavesson rein in the sergeant's hands pulling him forward, he was forced to move out. Once started, the bay colt went faster and faster around the sergeant, dragging the soldier along with him.

'Halt! Yoo-ah!' cried Sergeant John emphatically, snapping the cavesson rein sharply.

That brought Top Kick to a standstill, but he trembled all over and tried to break away. Quietly and patiently, the men began the lesson all over again.

As Top Kick circled the sergeant, he tried to gallop. When he was stopped, he refused to move out again. He stood and looked at the men defiantly. This whole business was a nuisance.

'Nothing mean about this colt,' said Sergeant John

Top Kick Is Ridden

after several days of work. 'He's just bull-headed and wants his own way. A smart horse is the one that can outwit you. But get Ben, that guy that hangs around him in all his spare time. Top Kick knows Ben. Get him ordered from the yearling stables to mine.'

'Top Kick will like that and behave better,' exclaimed the soldier as Tabby bounded ahead of Top Kick and the men as they went to the stable.

The next day, with Ben at his head, Top Kick moved out when ordered and stopped on signal. He was a new animal! Suddenly he had caught the idea of what was expected of him and obeyed commands willingly.

'Will we ever get a saddle on this colt?' asked Ben a week later as Top Kick reared and plunged, tossed his head and fought the snaffle bit. How he hated the cold steel in his mouth! He worked it around between his teeth, breathing hard.

But finally the colt accepted the bit and made no more fuss over it. And the blanket caused no trouble at all. He was quite unconcerned as it was put on him, and he reached down to sniff Tabby, who rubbed against his heels.

That day Top Kick was a willing pupil. As the training lesson began, he passed close to the window where Tabby sat. The next time around, the gray cat sprang lightly to the blanket on his back. Some children who were in the training-hall balcony shouted with laughter.

Top Kick paused, puzzled by the weight on his back and the burst of laughter. He turned to look at the cat and then continued to circle Sergeant John, who was laughing heartily.

Around the hall went Top Kick with Tabby on his

Top Kick

back, both animals acting as if this were an everyday occurrence. The cat had taken many liberties with the colt in the stall, including sleeping on his back, and Top Kick had grown fond of the friendly creature. So this ride Tabby was having did not bother the colt, and he seemed to carry her with pride.

The children shouted with glee. Their mother tried to hush them so they would not interrupt the training lesson.

'Trot,' commanded Sergeant Fisher.

But Tabby did not enjoy riding at the rougher gait and hopped off.

Now Sergeant John showed Top Kick a big awkward object which the animal sniffed at and examined with his nose. It had a horsy leathery smell and was smooth. The man put it on the colt's back, buckling it in place. At first Top Kick wriggled and tried to shake it off, but it held firmly. Not until toward the end of the training lesson that day would he accept the saddle.

When the stirrup straps were added, the real fun began. Top Kick snorted and squealed, reared and tore around. He wanted nothing to do with these awful things that banged against his sides!

'I don't blame you a bit,' said Ben, trying to pacify him.

Slowly and quietly he got the colt in hand. But it was several days before Top Kick would take the dangling stirrups calmly.

'Do you expect me to ride him now?' asked Ben anxiously as he looked at the still lively colt, who should have been tired after his long work-out.

'No, I'll get into the saddle myself,' said the sergeant.

Top Kick Is Ridden

'Here, give me a leg up. Careful, now. I mustn't touch him.'

As Top Kick suddenly felt the weight of the man on his back, a startled look came into his eyes. He trembled all over.

'Top Kick, it's all right,' said Ben soothingly as he patted his neck.

Gradually the colt calmed down, his confidence in the man overcoming his fear.

'Walk, yoo-ah!' came the command. But Top Kick refused to budge.

Gently the cavesson rein held by Ben on the ground urged him to move out. Top Kick wobbled from side to side. With this great burden on his back he couldn't make a good circle. Whenever he threatened to resist the commands, the kind voice of the sergeant and Ben brought his mind back to attention.

'That was too easy,' scoffed the sergeant as he returned him to the stable. 'Doesn't he beat the Dutch? Kicks up a fuss over the stirrups and then lets you ride him with no trouble at all.'

'That's Top Kick for you,' answered Ben. 'He likes to be boss, and he's smart, too.'

As soon as Top Kick could balance the sergeant's weight easily, the cavesson rein was discarded. Then he became conscious of a pressure on his mouth which almost hurt when he was to stop and suddenly loosened when he was expected to move out. Gradually he grew to wait for the signal from the reins to show him what to do.

Slowly, too, the sergeant's knees and weight became means of communication between the man and horse.

Top Kick

But as Top Kick was learning these 'aids,' he was giving his trainer plenty of annoyance.

In a backing lesson he suddenly began to rear, and the sergeant put in long hours of painstaking work before the colt forgot the habit.

One day Top Kick happened to push against one side of the hall so that one of the sergeant's legs could not be used to guide him. That gave him the idea for teasing the man. He would sidle toward the wall little by little and then try to brush the man off. It took a lot of persistence for the sergeant to make him stop that stunt.

Nor would Top Kick stand still when Sergeant John got into the saddle. He walked forward, backed up, twisted and turned. The patient man mounted and dismounted on both sides of the restless colt time after time every day. Still Top Kick refused to stand quietly.

At last a noose with a slipknot was put over the colt's head and under his upper lip. As the sergeant mounted and started off, he said, 'Steady,' and jerked the rope slightly. Only a few times did the smart animal need to connect the sound of that word with the discomfort of the sudden twitch on his lips. Ever afterward he knew that 'Steady' meant 'Hold still.'

'The best way to break a horse of a trait is to get his mind on something else,' said the wise sergeant.

'Like building a fire under a balky mule and then having him step forward enough so the wagon burns up?' laughed Ben.

'It's always easy to get a notion of Top Kick's out of his head,' said the sergeant. 'But the trouble is he's always got a brand-new one.'

Top Kick learned to walk, trot, and canter when com-

Top Kick Is Ridden

manded by the voice and the aids. He could be reined back, turned in small circles, and carried his head higher with his haunches well under him. But he was a sensitive, high-spirited animal full of mischief and with a mind of his own. So it took careful handling and patience to teach him the things he had to know.

Now it was time for Top Kick's first trip outdoors. At the stable door a sharp breeze hit the bay colt in the face and he blew through his nostrils noisily. The kind sergeant patted him and mounted.

'All right, Top Kick,' he said, giving the impulse to go forward with his knees and reins. The colt moved out.

But Top Kick had not carried a burden over uneven ground before, and he wobbled under his load. The reins directed him to a smooth bridle path.

So intent was Top Kick on responding to his rider that at first he did not notice where he was going. As he stumbled less, he looked about.

What was that queer-looking object that wriggled in his path? Top Kick danced away from it. Still it moved. Panic-stricken, the colt forgot his rider completely and tore past.

'Top Kick, don't be afraid of a branch!' said the sergeant soothingly, as he reined in the colt. Top Kick calmed down somewhat.

'Come on, let's go back and look at it.'

Gingerly the colt turned around with his ears back. He quivered all over and moved his feet with nervous, jerky steps as he approached the odd thing that twisted in the breeze.

'Top Kick, don't be silly! You've seen branches

Top Kick

blown by the wind in the pasture. What a fuss you're making now!"

Top Kick leaned down. The leaves rustled. He tossed his head and edged away.

Again the sergeant talked to the colt and brought him back to the frightening object on the path.

Finally Top Kick put his head down cautiously and curiously. His nose touched the branch. Sniffing, he touched it again.

Instantly his whole manner changed. His fear had left him. His ears came forward and he gave a little sigh.

Sergeant John took Top Kick back over the bridle path. When they came to the branch once more, the colt stiffened a moment, eyed it suspiciously; but he went over it, stepping high. But he did not tremble this time, nor show any alarm.

Four hours of every day Sergeant John and Top Kick spent in riding over the Front Royal hills. The bay colt soon learned to balance his rider well and he walked, trotted, and cantered without stumbling. He learned to know the entire post, its mountains, valleys, streams, and bridle paths. Steep slopes needed careful and cautious steps, but the level places could be galloped over with a joyousness that was caught by his rider.

While Top Kick was getting to know the terrain about Front Royal, he could not be a sight-seer, although he was curious about everything. He was being muscled and hardened, but most of all he was learning balance and perfect obedience to his rider. It was all play for him, however. Never did the wise horseman do anything to decrease Top Kick's high spirits.

'Top Kick's getting the sweetest manners of any colt I

Top Kick Is Ridden

ever saw,' said the sergeant to Ben one day as he dismounted.

Ben grinned from ear to ear.

'Don't blame you for being crazy about him!' added the sergeant. 'I'm sort of crazy about him myself.'

With the saddle off, Top Kick side-stepped playfully, even though he had just finished a long work-out on the Virginia hills.

'Nice work, Sergeant,' said Colonel Whittier, as he entered the stable. 'I've been watching your progress with this animal.'

'Thank you, sir,' said the sergeant.

As the colonel petted the frisky bay he added: 'Form and performance. That's the test of any Army horse, and Top Kick has both.'

Tabby purred loudly and rubbed against the colt. Top Kick put his head down to the gray fur and sniffed affectionately.



7. JINGO JOINS THE ARMY

TOP KICK had been trained by gentleness and kindness, and his confidence in men had never been shaken. But another colt was having a very different existence.

This little gray foal first saw the light of day on a large grassland in Texas. His mother belonged to a herd of mares led by a large powerful stallion. She was a wiry, nervous little mare who would slash out at him with her hind foot to prevent him from nursing. The bigger foals

Jingo Joins the Army

teased him and the mares crowded him away from the sweetest grass and from the water-hole. So from the first the little fellow was forced to fight for existence.

When the gray colt was three years old, he left his life in the open. One day toward dusk the big stallion was rounding up his herd into a tight group, when suddenly his ears went back, his head went down, and his nose stuck forward till he looked like an angry goose! Swiftly he charged at a strange horse with a man on his back.

Only by a quick dodge did the man and his mount save themselves. A rope whistled through the air, dropped over the big horse's head, and nearly jerked him off his feet as it tightened. The stallion charged again, but another lasso caught his foot, and in a short time the men had tied him up securely.

With their leader helpless, the herd was easily managed. Back and forth the ranchmen rode, sorting out the older colts. In a frightened group they were driven from the pasture, which was so large they had scarcely been aware of its confining fences, and into a corral.

There the young horses ran madly from one side of the enclosure to the other. Before the gray colt knew what was happening, a rope was around his neck, another on a hind leg, and he was lying on the ground. A burlap sack went over his eyes as he lay struggling. Not until he stopped fighting was he allowed to get to his feet.

Then a saddle was slipped on his back and both cinches were drawn so tight that he could hardly breathe. Suddenly he felt a weight on his back and heard a shout. He could see. For a few seconds he stood with legs far apart as if he were frozen. Then, with a wild snort of terror, he reared high in the air.

Top Kick

For an instant he pawed like a prizefighter, then came down with a terrific jolt. But the burden still clung to his back. He snorted frantically. He bucked, his back going up and down like a seesaw. Then he humped his back and bolted. But the fence caught him up sharply, and the rider was still in the saddle. On and on, the battle raged. The excited, frightened colt became an insane creature, fighting madly to dislodge the burden from his back.

At last, as the colt seemed tireless and the rider exhausted, another man appeared with a long wicked-looking whip. Every time the poor crazed animal rose in the air, he received a terrific cut across his flanks. When he arched his back, he was beaten viciously. No animal could continue a struggle against such odds. At last he stood quietly, his eyes blazing, his four feet planted firmly, and all his muscles contracted. He had been broken to the saddle!

In the next week or two the gray colt was ridden a few times. But the rider carried a mean crop and dug evil spurs into him whenever he showed any spirit. Soon he became a subdued, pitiful creature, cringing with fear, whenever he carried a saddle and rider.

In the corral he sometimes forgot his enemy — man! Then he capered about with his young companions and acted as a healthy three-year-old should.

One day, as he chased around the enclosure with his head and tail up, some men came to the fence. For an instant his ears went back in defiance, and then, since they kept their distance, he went on with his play.

'Now that gray colt, the one with so much spirit?' questioned the stranger, trying to be casual.

Jingo Joins the Army

'Oh, yes. Fine animal that. Plenty of life, but quiet as a mouse in the saddle.'

'Let's see him closer. Catch him, will you?'

As the colt was approached, he stood still in his tracks and stared at his despised rider. But the would-be purchaser was looking at his color and shape and so missed the ears laid back in hate.

The man caught and led the apparently docile colt to the stranger. After an examination of form and gaits, the sale was completed.

'I may as well tell you now that as soon as I saw this animal I knew I had to have him. You see, our Jingo just died and this colt seems the exact duplicate of him. So to our audiences this will be Jingo, Ralph Bemmer's private mount.'

'Gosh!' muttered the ranchman to himself. 'I sure didn't ask enough for him. I didn't know I was selling him to a circus.'

Then a new life opened for Jingo, Jingo the Second, but just Jingo on the billboards. Travel on a train terrified the gray colt; his end of the boxcar was comfortable, with food and a barrel of water, but the grinding of the wheels, the sound of the whistle and bell, the sudden jerks as the engine started and stopped, and the constant swaying of the car frightened him so that he could neither relax nor rest. He could not even doze because he felt the motion of the trains so keenly. When he arrived at a new show-town, he was so exhausted and nervous that he could do nothing to please the horsemen.

Ralph Bemmer, himself, was thoroughly disgusted with this new purchase. But since he had appeared in motion pictures with the celebrated Jingo, his audiences

Top Kick

demanded to see the famous animal. So the new Jingo was taught to hold his head high and to rear up when touched in front of the saddle. No doubt if Ralph Bemmer, who actually understood horses well, had taken time to make friends with his new mount, he would have discovered the reason for Jingo's contrariness. But the owner and manager of a Wild West Show is a very busy man.

At the end of a trip the feed boy, who was a grown man though slight, stocky, and yellow-skinned, would bring oats to Jingo. The poor animal had touched nothing on the train and the sight of his grain added further to his disturbed state. In his excitement he threw the oats from his manger. When he was offered a drink of water, he plunged his nose into the bucket so suddenly that he tipped it over.

'He — devil horse!' the slant-eyed feed boy said, his breath smelling strongly of raw fish.

And then, because he had to get more oats and another pail of water, he hit Jingo and spit at him hatefully with a hissing sound.

Jingo fought back! He struck at the fellow with his front feet — struck viciously. As the 'boy' continued to spit at him, hit him with the pitchfork, and otherwise abuse him, he grew more and more unmanageable. Bemmer became so completely out of patience with him that if another horse could have been found which resembled the old Jingo, he would have disposed of him at once.

But by the time the show reached Baltimore, worse things were bothering the owner. Funds had been running low for some time, and in Maryland those interests

Jingo Joins the Army

which held a mortgage on the horses and equipment insisted on a settlement. So everything had to go under the auctioneer's hammer.

It was a cold, rainy day in the late fall. Everyone had been working hard to get the animals groomed and the harness, saddles, wagons, and all property in first-class condition. Jingo felt the unusual tension as voices grew harsh and patience was at the breaking-point.

The feed boy vented his feelings on Jingo. As he gave him his oats and water for the last time, he struck him cruelly on the head. When the gray colt retaliated with a sharp nip, the Japanese picked up a pitchfork and beat the animal.

'Me fix-a you,' he cried. 'You big fake — show big fake.'

With the odor of raw fish adding to his temper, Jingo fought back until the men came running. Finally they beat him into submission with a long black hose. So when Jingo was led out to the auction block, he had had only a hurried dressing and he was still in a fighting mood.

In the crowd that had assembled were many excellent judges of horseflesh — Virginia's fox-hunting horsemen, Maryland's country gentlemen, and horse breeders and farmers. There, too, was an Army colonel who was in charge of the Army Remount Service in the Quartermaster General's Office in Washington. Always on the lookout for new mounts for the Army, he and his associate moved about, inspecting the horses critically. At last they came to Jingo.

'About sixteen hands high,' the colonel said under his breath. 'If you were any taller, I couldn't consider you, big boy!'

Top Kick

He noted Jingo's Roman nose, the width between his eyes, and his wide nostrils.

'Do you like a Roman nose?' asked his companion dubiously.

'Not particularly for looks,' the colonel replied. 'But it shows bottom. This horse should stand hard riding.'

'Wide eyes show intelligence, but I don't like the look in them,' said the other man.

'Yes, he seems "spooky" to me. Although he's Ralph Bemmer's famous horse, he acts afraid of people.'

The men tried to open his mouth to estimate his age from his teeth, but he struck at them with his forefeet and thrashed about so much that they could only guess his age.

'About five years old, I'd say! His neck tends to be thick, but it's muscular and well shaped. He's cold-blooded, not thoroughbred. A long shoulder blade with a good slope — shows he's speedy and an easy rider.'

Jingo reared up suddenly, threatening to break his halter-shank.

'But he's a bad actor,' said the second man.

The colonel smiled. 'I'm not worried about that. He's a young horse, and his habits aren't so well formed that my men at the remount station can't break him of them. If he were older, well ——' and he shrugged.

'Maybe he's a naturally vicious horse.'

'I'll take a chance on that,' said the colonel. 'Anyway, he's apt to go higher than the Army can afford, since he's the celebrated Jingo.'

Then the auction began. One by one the horses were displayed, their fine qualities pointed out, and each sold to the highest bidder. The people milled around Jingo,

Jingo Joins the Army

pulling at his halter-shank until he became increasingly wild. He struck out viciously with his front foot. A good many eyes that had admired him turned away in disappointment at the exhibition of the worst trait a horse can have.

In vain did the auctioneer sing his praises. With his gray coat only partially groomed, his head swaying restlessly from side to side and his eyes rolling wildly, Jingo appeared at his worst. When led, he showed his temper by kicking viciously. And somehow the fact that he was not the real Jingo had leaked out.

'Going, going, gone!' sang out the auctioneer. 'Sold to the United States Army Remount Service for one hundred and ten dollars!'

The crowd laughed.

'Some horse for a rookie!' said one.

After considerable difficulty the gray horse was loaded into a big Army truck with other animals purchased for the Army. A ride of about a hundred miles brought them to Front Royal in the Virginia mountains.

A few days of rest in a comfortable paddock and then Jingo was led to a chute. This was something new and, as usual, the gray colt fought fiercely. But these men were experts in handling animals, and before he knew what was happening Jingo was moving down the narrow lane. He stepped gingerly into the edge of a big vat of ill-smelling green liquid. A minute later he was in the middle of it. Terrified by the odor of sulphur, he tried to scramble out. But three times his head was pushed clear under the water. Then he found he could walk out easily. He had had a sulphur bath to disinfect him thoroughly.

Top Kick

For three weeks Jingo was quarantined, as are all re-mounts on their arrival at any Army post. While in quarantine he became ill with influenza. He was a very sick horse.

He pulled through, however, and as he recuperated he was turned into a corral that was protected from wind and weather. Here the early spring sun beat down upon him, the mountain air gave him fresh energy, and he had not a worry in the world. At last he began to kick up his heels and run around the corral like a normal five-year-old.

So one day he was taken to new quarters. The re-mount stables happened to be full, so he was put into an empty stall in the three-year-olds' barn.

Here were other animals. Here were men busy taking colts to and from the stable for exercise and training. The activity both inside and out reminded Jingo of his days with the Wild West Show, and he grew more and more nervous.

As darkness came on, the colts settled down for the night. Jingo had never been with so many animals under one roof. He did not know what a loud noise a horse can make when it snores. Two old horses, who worked on the hay-loader and had been put into the stable for convenience, trumpeted loudly all night.

Suddenly in the dim light a gray form slipped into his stall. He breathed in short gasps. It wasn't big, but it moved stealthily. Out slashed his heels!

The small gray form gave a terrified cry.

Top Kick in the next stall sprang to his feet at the sound. There in the half-light lay Tabby, his friend. The bay colt whinnied softly and the bundle of gray fur

Jingo Joins the Army

crept into his stall, mewing plaintively. Jingo, the new horse, stared at his neighbor with fire in his eyes.

Top Kick made no sound. He gave no sign of temper. But he turned his back on Jingo, who was friendless and lonely, and dropped his head. Tabby, his stall mate, was badly hurt and he nosed her gently and lovingly.



8. JINGO WINS A FRIEND

THE next morning there was a great commotion in the training stables, a pounding and slashing of hoofs against the wooden sides of a stall. Top Kick looked around his partition at his new neighbor with big eyes.

The new horse was a bad actor. Jingo was striking at Ben, who was offering him food. He reared suddenly as the man went near his head, struck viciously with both front feet, squealing with hate.

Ben barely saved himself by a sidewise jump. 'He's a devil. That horse is a killer,' said the frightened man.

Jingo Was a Friend

'He's been yanked or hit on the head. That's the reason he's "head shy" and strikes with his front feet,' said the wise sergeant.

In spite of his bad manners, the stablemen tried to make friends with Jingo. For several days they talked to him in low tones, patted him whenever they dared, and tried to gain his confidence. But he responded to their kindness only by showing temper when they came too near.

When he was taken out of his stall for exercise, he went with ears back. Either he rushed to the door or refused to budge. The men never knew what to expect from him, but they were always on the alert. But each day, after he was led behind a steady old horse over the hills, he returned to the barn a bit calmer and more sensible, but he still kicked when he was groomed and was unreliable.

At Top Kick's stall there was often an admiring audience. Colonel Whittier brought his officers, horsemen of the Virginia country, and friends to see the colt that was not only an outstanding beauty, but was beginning to be a marvelous performer as well. The soldiers loved the bay colt and brought him tidbits. To all this attention Top Kick responded as a gentleman should, with appreciation and friendliness.

Jingo watched this little show going on day after day. Once in a while a carrot, an apple, or a lump of sugar would be offered him. When he had acquired a taste for these delicacies, he wanted to share Top Kick's treats. Gradually he learned that he got more of the tasty morsels if he allowed people to pet him. So into the unruly horse's mind grew an association of petting with the

Top Kick

pleasure of eating. Not until later did Jingo show that he liked the petting without reward.

While the men were winning Jingo's confidence, they were also teaching him. He was given the regular long-rein or longeing lessons of an untrained colt. Around and around the sergeant, he went hour after hour, day after day, until he unhesitatingly obeyed the signals to stop, go, walk, trot, and gallop. Top Kick, carrying Ben, often walked around the hall to get cooled off after lively runs over the Virginia hills, so they could watch Jingo's progress with interest.

'When you mount him, remember he bucks,' warned the sergeant. 'Be sure your cinch is tight and keep his head up. He'll pitch you off if he can.'

That day Jingo's shrill squeal as he felt the man's weight on his back brought many of the stablemen to the training hall. Top Kick and Ben stopped in the doorway to see what would happen. The gray horse had arched himself and was sidling toward the walls. He tried to brush the man off, but a sharp jerk from the reins made him forget that. Back in the center of the hall he did not run or buck, but twisted himself into curves, whipping himself from one figure to another so quickly that his rider was almost unseated.

Suddenly he plunged and threw his head between his forelegs, trying to jerk the reins from the soldier's hands. When that didn't succeed, he reached for the man's leg, with lips back and teeth showing, ready to bite. But his rider was too quick for him and yanked his head up.

Jingo ran madly about the hall, wobbling, stopping, and lurching in a wild attempt to get the man off his back. Snorting defiance, he bucked, pitched, and

Jingo Wins a Friend

reared. But the soldier stuck to him, using his reins and weight so cleverly that he outplayed the gray's efforts. Finally, panting and blowing, Jingo calmed down.

There was not a sound from the onlookers, only the sharp puffs from the horse and the low voice of the soldier as he talked to him. Gradually, as the animal was brought under control and responded to the rider's wishes, he was praised and patted on the neck. Top Kick must have known Jingo's hard lesson of obedience was being learned.

Weeks of slow loose-rein work in the riding hall followed. Jingo finally would bend his head toward the trainer to allow him to stroke his neck when the lesson was over. There was a new soft light in his eyes.

'He's not afraid now and he's finding out what is expected of him,' said the sergeant with approval. 'Fear and ignorance of what to do make many a bad horse. Unless he's just naturally mean, any remount can be gentled and trained until he's a credit to the Army.'

When Jingo became more tractable, he and Top Kick began outside work together — Ben on the bay colt and the sergeant on the gray. Top Kick's calm manner quieted the other animal, who always showed uneasiness and fear outdoors. Gradually the two horses became accustomed to one another as they went over the Front Royal hills together day after day. But the bay colt would show no friendliness toward Jingo.

The colts and remounts spent Sundays in the pasture. There they romped and played, pounded up the slopes and raced down again. This was the best day of all the week!

One Sunday morning, Top Kick was galloping over

Top Kick

the hilltop when suddenly he slid to a stop. His ears went back and he trembled. Jingo had followed him and had stopped beside him. A faint sound of baying came to them from the next knoll, but nothing unusual could be seen.

Suddenly across the brow of the hill flashed a red-and-brown streak. After it poured a string of hounds, yipping as they ran.

Top Kick reared and snorted. The sight and sound of dogs had terrified him ever since his experience with the sheep-killer in the yearling pasture. How these brown-and-white-spotted creatures tore over the ground and rent the air with their cries! Even the sight of horsemen with riders, following the hounds, did not reassure him.

Jingo was not disturbed by the fox hunt. But suddenly he drew a deep breath and let it out with a snort! He shied sharply and stepped high as though walking on eggs. Top Kick stood still trembling, his terrified eyes following the dogs.

Without warning Jingo jumped. He plunged straight at Top Kick, roughly knocking him aside.

Top Kick reared. Quivering with fright, he looked down. An offensive odor now came to his sensitive nostrils. There lay a copperhead snake, coiled and ready to strike. The colt leaped nimbly out of danger.

The scent of the dreaded enemy of his early days in the Southwest, a snake, had suddenly awakened Jingo's wildest instincts. Squealing, he struck viciously at the copperhead with his forefeet, again and again. Having killed it, he pounded it into a pulp, so fierce was his temper. But he had saved Top Kick, who had never

Jingo Wins a Friend

seen a dangerous snake before. Jingo had proved himself a friend.

Soon after this, Top Kick was measured and weighed again. At three years old he was fifteen and one half hands high and weighed ten hundred and fifty pounds. He was practically full grown.

'Well, Top Kick,' said Ben sadly, 'you got orders to go to Riley to be a cavalry horse. I sure hate to see you go.'

Tabby rubbed against the bay colt's legs as if she understood that her friend would soon be leaving her. Jingo leaned an inquisitive head around the partition.

'Yes, Jingo, you're going, too, but I think I can bear it,' said the man, remembering the long struggle with the unruly horse.

In the next few days, the older colts and remounts were examined by veterinary officers, the horseshoer, and report officers. The animals felt the excitement in the air.

Finally the day arrived. Top Kick must have realized it as soon as he stretched himself, raised his head, and got to his feet. Tabby bounced up from her bed beside him, but she would not leave the stall. A breakfast of mash instead of grain would have told an old-timer that a long trip was ahead of him, but Top Kick did not know this. The men's voices were different, and Ben stopped even oftener than usual to pet his favorite.

It was time to prepare the animals for the trip. When Ben bandaged Top Kick's legs as a protection from bumps on the train, all the men who could get away from their duties clustered about the stall — Corporal Brown from the weanling and yearling stables, the old Sergeant Daniels from Green Hills. Each told all the

Top Kick

clever things Top Kick had done while under his care. Never had the bay colt received such an audience.

'See him look at us,' said the training sergeant. 'He understands he's going!'

Ben, who had taken no part in the praise of Top Kick, tried to speak but only sputtered. The brown head went up affectionately against his khaki chest.

'Where's the soldier who has managed to follow Top Kick to each stable so as to handle him, care for him, and help train him?' asked the Washington officer.

'Right here, sir,' gulped Ben, jumping to his feet and saluting.

The two colonels looked at the soldier, who had come to Front Royal a big gawky fellow who always did things awkwardly and was constantly being blamed for mishaps. Now he was straight, clear-eyed, and had a new confidence in himself as he waited for his superiors to speak. This was no chap to take the brunt of things, to be put upon by others.

'Love of a horse will do things to a fellow,' said Colonel Whittier kindly. 'You're losing Top Kick, son, but you'll never lose what he has done for you.'

'Yes, sir,' answered Ben, squaring his shoulders. 'Thank you, sir.'

Then came the loading. The bay colt watched Jingo as he went up the platform and then jerked back at the door of the van. Again and again this was repeated. To the gray horse a horse truck must have meant life in the Bemmer show again.

Finally a strap held by several soldiers was put around his rump and Jingo was forced to move up on the ramp toward the van door. But when only a step would have

Jingo Wins a Friend

put him in the vehicle, he reared with such force that he broke away from all of them. Away the gray flew! His feet hardly touched the ground. The loading of the other horses continued.

Soon Jingo returned and nudged against Top Kick as Ben held him. The bay perked up his ears and sidled closer to his friend. In a twinkling Ben had caught Jingo's halter-shank.

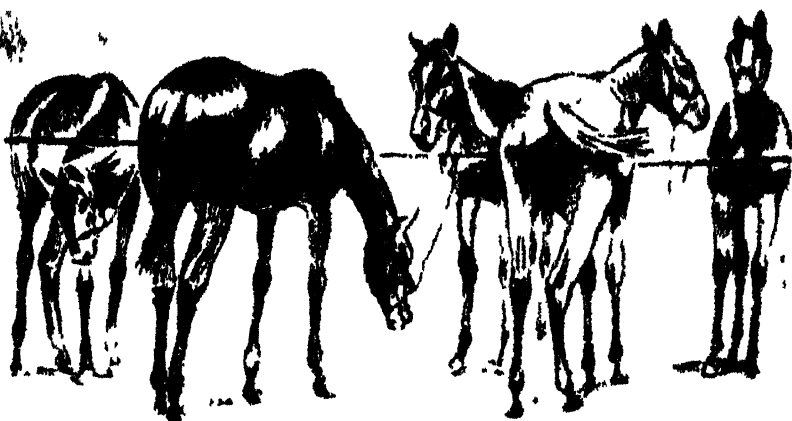
'Load Top Kick first,' said the wise sergeant. 'Then see if you can't get Jingo in after him!'

The bay colt sniffed as he approached the van. Ben allowed him to smell the ramp. Then, talking soothingly and petting him, the man led him into the horse truck without any trouble. A last pat and a quick 'Good-bye, good luck,' from a throat that had a catch in it, and Ben was gone!

As Jingo was led to the truck, Top Kick was nickering softly after Ben. With a bound that almost upset the soldier, Jingo plunged into the van.

Soon the floor shook. The vehicle was moving. The van rolled out on the highway.

Top Kick was leaving his colthood days behind him — his mother, Swing-Time, Storm King, Tabby, Ben, and the kind Army men who had trained him. His play days were over! From now on he and Jingo would be cavalry mounts. They were soldier recruits on the way to their first station.



9. THE REMOUNTS AT RILEY

THE horse van rolled along over the paved roads, bumping the animals against the padded sides as it went around the curves. Shortly it stopped, the door was thrown open, and Top Kick was led down to the ground.

A whistle shrieked. A roar, growing louder and louder as it came toward them, made Top Kick rear on his haunches.

Then he saw it. A huge black monster making horrible sounds and puffing out steam and smoke. On it came, straight at him. Motionless with terror he watched its approach. The soldier who held his halter-shank talked to him quietly and took a firmer grip. With a final spurt of steam, the railway engine tore past. Poor Top Kick was weak with fright.

One by one the horses were put into a railway car. Top Kick was still frightened and upset when his turn came. He pulled back, plunged to the side, and tried to

The Remounts at Riley

get away. Step by step he had to be persuaded to go through the padded doorway to his stall on the train.

Top Kick blinked in the shadow of the car after the bright sunlight of outdoors. Then he could see the tiny windows, the sand-covered floor, and the part of the car that was partitioned off for him.

An inquiring whinny from outside made him whinny back. Was Jingo to be left behind? He stamped his feet impatiently.

Jingo fought the men. Top Kick could hear him squeal and thrash around. Poor Jingo! His travels with the Wild West Show had been such a nightmare that no wonder he bucked at the sight of a railway car.

A clatter of hoofs on the ramp! Excited voices of soldiers! At last Jingo boarded the train. Into Top Kick's compartment he went, wet with sweat and trembling all over from his struggle.

Top Kick nickered softly. The soldier who was to travel with the horses talked soothingly to him.

But when a whistle blew two short blasts and a fearful grinding of wheels on metal rails began, Top Kick was the frightened one. He crouched low. As the train lurched into motion, he staggered back and forth drunkenly. Now it was Jingo who nuzzled him in sympathy.

For two days and nights the animals rolled along after a noisy thing that puffed and blew and whistled. Top Kick and Jingo stood side by side, fearful and worried, never dozing except when the train was motionless on a sidetrack for a few hours. The trip was a trial to both of them, and they depended on each other.

At last they arrived at Fort Riley. Bewildered and confused from the trip, the horses at last found them-

Top Kick

selves in the bright Kansas sunshine. How good the firm ground felt under their feet!

Top Kick willingly followed the soldier through the gate into a corral. He looked about. It was a pleasant place after the awful swaying boxcar. Soon Jingo and the other horses from Front Royal were in the corral, too. For a day or two they were quiet and sedate. But by the end of their three weeks' quarantine period, they felt quite at home and scampered about and kicked up their heels as usual.

One morning they were caught and led to the veterinary hospital, where they were sprayed with sulphur. Top Kick didn't like the whirring sound of the machine and the bad-smelling breeze which tickled his skin and arose in clouds about him. He endured the ordeal, however, stamping his feet. Then he was ready to live in the stables.

Sergeant Joe of the Seventh Cavalry, which is a colored troop, met Top Kick. He patted the bay colt kindly and gave him a comfortable box stall. Top Kick inspected his new home and tasted the hay.

'Sarg, what ails this here fool hoss?' exploded Zack, Joe's stable assistant, in the midst of some confusion at the door. Top Kick raised his head to listen.

'Now, quit actin' up!' cried Zack, as Jingo's squeal told who the offender was.

When Top Kick whinnied a welcome, the gray horse calmed down and let himself be led into the next stall. Two noses went across the partition to rub each other. Regardless of what Fort Riley had in store for them, at least the two were together.

The Negro stable sergeant and the soldiers were kind

The Remounts at Riley

and took good care of their horses. They were cheerful and happy-go-lucky and often sang at their work. Top Kick accepted them without fuss, but Jingo did not trust men so quickly.

However, it was evident Top Kick was not wholly contented. He kept looking out of his stall window as though watching for someone. Whenever a man came into the stable, a whinny rose in his throat, but stopped when he saw it was not Ben. Top Kick was homesick.

In his restlessness, Top Kick began to rub the wood of his door with his nose. Then he tried his teeth on it. It was a pleasant pastime, to bite hard and see if his teeth could pierce the wood.

'Don't you start cribbin',' said Zack as he noticed the injured door. 'Chewin' wood is a powerful bad habit.'

The colored man fastened a metal strip over the place where Top Kick had tried his teeth.

The bay colt often noticed an odd sound in the stall on the other side of him. Scrape, scratch, grunt, and groan!

One day the grunting sound was louder. A new soldier who had just been put on stable duty paused at the next stall.

'Sarg, get along here quick! This here hoss's chokin' hisself to death!'

The man came running.

'Quit gnawin' that door,' said Sergeant Joe, jerking the horse's head. 'He ain't chokin'. He's just suckin' wind.'

'What make him do that?' asked the new man.

'It's like this: He sucks wind an' then gets a pain. It do look like a hoss have sense enough to quit before he gets in such a fix.'

Top Kick

'What's that for?' asked the puzzled stableman as Sergeant Joe went toward the horse with a leather strap.

'It clamp him down. He can't gnaw wood with a strap tight on his neck.'

'Ain't it goin' stop him from eatin'?'

'Naw, it ain't goin' hurt him nohow 'cept when he sucks air,' said Sergeant Joe as he buckled it in place.

'I don't see no sense to it unless it goin' cure him,' insisted the new soldier.

'Maybe it ain't goin' cure him, but it goin' keep 'im from gettin' worser.'

'You see that, Top Kick!' added the sergeant as he patted the bay colt, who was peering around the partition. 'Eatin' wood's bad business for a hoss. It make him no good.'

Again Top Kick stationed himself at the window of his stall. His eyes followed every horse, vehicle, and man that passed. He began to snort a bit as he always did when a sharp breeze hit him in the face.

Whang! Bang! The wind closed his shutters with a snap. The bay horse pushed them open with his nose.

Then Top Kick saw a large dun-colored horse amble by with a sway-back and ears that flopped. His face had a look of age from his muzzle to the pits above his eyes. Although the new recruit at Riley had never seen the old fellow before, he nickered and nickered again.

The old horse had moved out of sight, but at that insistent greeting, he lumbered back into view. He came up to Top Kick's window.

Kerbang! Again the shutters closed in Top Kick's face. The bay could hardly open them a second time, so excited was he.

The Remounts at Riley

'Top Kick, how come you don't want your windows shut? You don't like wind, do you?' said Zack, as he closed and locked the shutters securely. Only then was Top Kick unable to get them open.

The clever horse turned his attention to the door. He leaned hard against it, but it held rigidly. He rubbed the bolt with his nose. He grabbed it with his teeth, shaking the door vigorously.

Jingo looked around the partition in surprise, but his friend continued to fuss with the latch of his door.

Ping! The bolt shot back. Top Kick snorted in amazement as the door swung open — he walked out.

From another stable the wind brought the odor of sweet-smelling hay, as it was being stored for the winter, and the sounds of the men at work. Top Kick watched for a moment as he reached the sunshine; then he trotted around his own stable, his sharp eyes looking for the old horse.

The dun-colored horse was nowhere to be seen. Finally Top Kick ventured toward the load of new-mown hay, but there was not a horse in sight except the two hitched to the wagon. Work almost stopped as the Negro soldiers talked.

'I done tied up Ol' Corky to put up hay today, and bless-my-type if he ain't gone! He ontied hisself. Where's he at, I wonder?'

'Ol' Corky hidin' again? I told you he goin' smell that fresh hay an' hide so he ain't goin' work on the hay-loader!' said a new voice.

Suddenly the black man's eyes spied Top Kick. 'Great Scot in the mornin'!' he cried. 'How Top Kick get out?'

Top Kick

As the soldier came toward him, Top Kick bounded nimbly away.

After quite a hunt, the bay horse found Old Corky behind a high bush. Top Kick danced up to him. The old fellow's lack of greeting puzzled him, for the dun-colored horse looked companionable and his eyes were kind. As the bay weanling had once touched noses with Storm King, so now did the grown Top Kick reach out for the old muzzle. It was soft and friendly, and Top Kick buried his head in the velvety old neck.

All night long the two stayed together. Old Corky led his protégé to a valley with a creek where the grass was sweet-tasting and the wind did not strike them. But toward morning it grew colder, and they stood close to each other with Top Kick's head on the other's shoulder for warmth and comfort. At the first light of day, the old horse started for the stables. Soon it would be feeding time. But he wheezed painfully as he climbed the hill with Top Kick close behind him.

'Don't you beat all creation, Ol' Corky?' Zack greeted them in the stable yard. 'Stealin' off with Top Kick!'

The old horse went serenely on toward his stall in another building. The Negro soldier caught Top Kick and stabled him.

'How come you play 'round with that old warhoss?' grumbled Zack as he groomed the bay. 'He ain't young and frisky like you is, Top Kick.'

'How come he's at Riley?' asked the man who was using the currycomb on Jingo.

'He's a soldier hoss with a big record, and he's retired. He only works on the hay-loader when he can't hide, an' he mows the grass an' such. Funny thing about Ol'

The Remounts at Riley

Corky, he never makes a sound. Don't whinny or groan or neigh.'

'That's funny,' said the other. 'But why is your outfit so crazy 'bout the old plug?' Then he added, 'Say, is that why he's called Corky — 'cause he's a plug?'

Zack took a big breath and ignored the slur on his name. 'Ol' Corky is the smartest hoss that ever lived, an' don't you forget it! Ain't it smart to hide when he smells hay? Ain't it smart to bring Top Kick back when it's time to eat? This here wouldn't be Riley without Ol' Corky!'

Soon the remount stable became a hive of activity. Cavalry school was about to open. The new horse recruit soon had little time to watch for Old Corky.

One day all the remounts and new horses were led out to the picket line. Twenty-five student officers assembled and drew lots.

'Captain Persons — Top Kick!' said the instructor.

A short fat captain came to Top Kick's head, but there was no friendliness between the two.

The class work started at once. The officer put a head-stall on Top Kick awkwardly. The longeing lesson began.

It was old work for Top Kick, and he proceeded to make the fat captain look ridiculous. He galloped around the bewildered officer fast enough to make him dizzy. Then he stopped and refused to go again, watching the man mischievously with snapping bright eyes. Not until toward the end of the hour did the new trainer have any control of the animal, and then Top Kick obeyed heedlessly. It was a bad beginning for the two.

'Poor Top Kick!' said Zack sympathetically, as he

Top Kick

rubbed the animal down after the work-out. 'Ain't it a pity? You got the rattle-headedest one of the whole caboodle! Anybody could figger he ain't Cavalry. He can't ride. All he can do is slap his boots with his crop!'

'I agrees with you. He can't ride, but did you see the long-legged fellow on Jingo?' inquired the man who was grooming the gray horse in the next stall. 'He's a ridin' fool! Hosses is old stuff to 'im! He'll take the kinks out of this baby! An' Jingo'll like it!'

After a couple of weeks of circling about their charges, the fat captain mounted Top Kick. Then the work started in earnest — the twenty-five remounts ridden by the student officers with the instructor in the center of the big riding hall.

When Top Kick felt sharp heels in his side he plunged forward.

'Persons!' yelled the major. 'Move your horse forward from the pressure of your legs, not from a kick!'

The bay colt could feel his rider slump from the reprimand. As Top Kick followed the animals in front of him, the officer collected himself and tried to do as told, but his legs were so tight that his mount could hardly move. The colt's ears went back.

'Persons!' Not only the man jumped but Top Kick, too. 'You're squeezing him so hard he'll shoot from under you like a watermelon seed!'

At last Top Kick could feel his rider acquiring some skill in balance, and the handling of his reins was better. Still the instructor talked about the 'vibrating rein,' arms that were 'pokers,' and 'daylight between horse and rider.' The lively colt was always a handful for the captain, so it was hard for him to follow instructions.

The Remounts at Riley

One day Top Kick saw a handsome horse coming straight at him in the hall. He skidded to a stop as the two came together. So did the oncoming horse. A burst of laughter from the student officers made Top Kick look again. He could see his rider on the back of the other. He must have known he was looking into a mirror, for he suddenly went on around the hall quite unconcerned. But the captain got his share of kidding over the incident. Ever after that whenever he caught sight of himself in the glass, Top Kick arched his neck with pride.

Day after day Top Kick was trained by his officer to be a quiet dependable troop horse, and the horse was teaching the man how to ride. Top Kick changed his leads and gaits smoothly and quickly. He did not stiffen his jaw and his mouth was sensitive to the bit. But he was like a child wanting to play in school. He had so much energy that his fat captain was tired out by the time he finally settled down to work.

'You're falling off, aren't you, Persons?' asked the instructor as he noticed how much thinner the officer had become.

'Yes, seven times already,' admitted the captain sheepishly.

Soon part of the class work was transferred out-of-doors. Now Top Kick was more active than before and his captain had to be continually on the alert. But the man was gradually learning to enjoy the bay's high spirits.

Horses and riders marched in drills and in columns of fours. They became accustomed to the pressure of ranks and to acting together in unison. The post band taught

Top Kick

rhythm to the animals, who instinctively kept time to it. How Top Kick stepped to the music!

The students and their horses came home tired from a cross-country ride one day. Bang, bang! A pistol shot. Top Kick jumped and shied. He spilled his officer into the dirt.

Top Kick had heard the sound of firing when working in the practice ring. But it had never been so close to him before. His rider, shooting the pistol well away from the horse's ears, was not ready for the bay's reaction to it. This first lesson to accustom Top Kick to the use of arms from his back put the captain in the hospital with a broken collarbone.

'How come you throwed the captain, Top Kick?' asked Zack as he rubbed down the horse. 'Was you scared or just plumb tired of totin' him around? Anyway, you is smart to get rid of him.'



10. OLD CORKY

IN THE weeks that followed, Top Kick had a series of student officers to carry in class. One lacked perfect balance so that the bay horse had to shift his own body to keep directly under him. Another had 'poor hands,' and did not anticipate the horse's intentions and give him more or less rein to help him. Top Kick could notice that some of the officers had long legs, others short; some riders relaxed comfortably in the saddle, others were tense and rigid. No doubt the poor horse would have

Top Kick

preferred the fat officer, whose faults he knew. Jingo in the meantime was being trained by a tall officer who thoroughly understood horses. So well were the gray's peculiarities known to his rider that Jingo found himself checkmated whenever he tried any of his spells of temper, his pranks, or plain disobedience. Now he seldom showed his worst trait, striking with his forefeet, either in or out of the stable.

The class soon began flock-riding outside. Top Kick and Jingo enjoyed the company of other horses and riders.

Fort Riley was ideal for riding, with steep canyons, slopes leading down to the bottoms, timber and prairies. The hills taught the bay and the gray to collect and extend themselves. The obstacles, rocks, ditches, and fallen trees which they jumped or went around, kept them on the alert. They lifted their feet, picked their way, and learned how to keep their legs under them.

The horses always left the stables at a walk and kept a slow pace until they were warmed up. Then they spread out in a fan-shaped group, following the instructor's mount, who rode ahead to set the pace and choose the course.

One day they were flock-riding as usual when they came to Cemetery Slide. Top Kick bore a timid young officer, and Jingo, for the first time in months, had a new rider.

'Gee whiz!' exclaimed the man on Top Kick under his breath, gripping tighter with his knees.

Top Kick and Jingo had gone down Battery Hill Slide several times, but now they must try this steep canyon wall. The officers, who had heard about this bugbear

Old Corky

ever since they had been in the cavalry, stirred uneasily in their saddles. The horses reflected their feeling and stamped forefeet.

'Start down straight,' said the instructor, 'and keep going that way. Legs against your horse and your body forward!'

Top Kick could sense his officer's feelings as he heard a deep breath, felt the reins gripped more firmly and knees squeezed to move out.

Top Kick hesitated only an instant. Picking his way carefully, he let his forelegs over the rim. A step or two and his back feet began to slide in the soft dirt.

'Good boy! Good boy!' said the man encouragingly.

Up went Top Kick's ears even straighter.

Down the slide Top Kick went, catching his balance at times to take a few steps, and then sliding again. The officer kept his weight forward so that the horse could use his loin muscles freely. At the bottom, Top Kick ran a little way as the slope leveled off.

'Old Boy, we did it!' exclaimed the officer enthusiastically, patting him.

But Jingo and his new stout officer were not faring so well. Always the big awkward clown, Jingo seized this opportunity to lurch sidewise and spill his rider. He galloped up to Top Kick neighing as if he had done a smart trick.

But Jingo's officer had broken his arm!

'If your horse stumbles, always give him his head. When you feel yourself going, fall relaxed and roll away from your horse,' said the instructor to the class, after the injured man and a companion had started for the post. 'That officer was stiff when he fell. Jingo is not



Old Corky

thoroughly reliable, and should be ridden with a firm rein and tight knees.'

As Top Kick and Jingo were being rubbed down at the stable that afternoon, a heated discussion was going on.

Zack argued long and urgently. 'Ol' Corky can be put in one of these empty stalls and we can slip him out Saturday at inspection time. What you say?'

'But he's poorly, he sick. How come you don't take 'im to the Vet?' protested the sergeant. 'Sick hosses gotta have a doctor.'

'How come I don't? You knows what happens to old hosses when they goes to the hospital. They don't never come back.'

All the men nodded sympathetically.

'I get busted if the colonel finds another hoss in this stable with the school hosses,' muttered the sergeant.

Top Kick whinnied a welcome as the old dun-colored horse was brought into the stable, where the soldiers could watch over him without having his condition discovered. Old Corky's head hung low and he looked sick. He breathed fast. He did not even notice Top Kick.

'Sure enough, his mouth is hot and feels sticky,' Sergeant Joe said as he examined Old Corky. 'How come he catch cold?'

'That lazy good-for-nothin' forgot to shut his stall door tight an' he got out in the wind all day. Wish I could lay my hands on 'im,' said Zack emphatically.

The soldiers decided that what Old Corky needed was blankets wrung out of hot water and wrapped closely around him, covered by dry ones and changed every half-hour.

Top Kick

'Look like he perkin' up,' said Zack in relief at midnight, when he at last rubbed the old horse dry and put on a fresh blanket.

Top Kick caught the tone of relief in the soldier's voice.

But Old Corky was still a very sick horse. He would not lie down. All through the night, Top Kick could hear him coughing and breathing fast.

When Top Kick came back from class the next day, there was a big group of the colored soldiers around Old Corky's stall.

'He worser,' said Zack in a distressed voice. 'He won't touch this nice bran mash. He don't like apples an' he won't pay no attention to a carrot.' Zack blew his nose.

'He powerful sick,' said another. 'Maybe he like some milk?'

'Milk?' All the men looked at one another.

Zack shot out from the group and returned in a short time with two quarts of milk. Old Corky took a little sip gingerly. A few minutes later he had finished it.

The men were delighted. 'That do the trick. Eggs in milk is what sick folkses get,' said one.

'So why ain't it good for hosses, too?' asked Zack.

More milk, with eggs broken up in it, was brought and Old Corky drank his eggnog. It was decided there would be less comment if each man would buy a quart of milk at a time. Old Corky drank three or four gallons a day, so it took a good many trips to the post exchange. He seemed better, too.

But the next day Zack was worried. 'His legs is so cold like he's daid,' he said as he rubbed them.

Old Corky

He tore a khaki blanket into strips and wound them around Old Corky's legs to warm them.

'Where you git that blanket you tearin' up?' said Sergeant Joe sternly.

'It's mine and I got it off'en my own baid,' said Zack.

'You get pneumony, too, sleepin' without it. That's a gov'ment blanket. What right you got to tear up a gov'ment blanket?'

'Ol' Corky need it worse than me,' said Zack stoutly. 'Lookit Top Kick,' he added.

Top Kick moved uneasily in his stall.

'What's the matter, boy?' Zack asked. 'You know Ol' Corky's sick, don't you? That's all right. Zack knows.'

By Saturday morning Old Corky's breathing had become still more rapid and difficult. His flanks heaved and he was covered with perspiration.

'Now I goin' catch it. Ol' Corky too sick to take out of here and they goin' find him at inspection. Now, I'm sure in for a lambastin',' the sergeant wailed.

But his real worry was over the old horse. Zack had worked day and night over Old Corky, never leaving his stall except when he had to take remounts to the hall, a task which the other men could not do for him. So deep was Sergeant Joe's sympathy for Zack that he had no regrets for what he had done.

During the inspection that morning, the colonel and the officers stood speechless for an instant when they saw the sick Old Corky.

'But didn't you think of the danger of contagion to the jumpers in this stable?' cried the colonel.

Sergeant Joe hung his head. 'No, sah,' he admitted humbly. 'I guess all we done thought of was Ol' Corky.'

Top Kick

'What do you think we have a veterinary hospital for?' another officer demanded.

'Sick hosses, sah!' said Sergeant Joe.

A veterinary officer was called at once. 'The men have given Old Corky the right kind of care with the hot blankets and the bandages and milk. But that horse is so old and so sick I'm afraid we can't save him,' he said.

Old Corky, swathed in blankets and woolen bandages, was led slowly to the veterinary hospital, Joe following behind. Despair showed in every line of the black man's body.

'Where's Ol' Corky?' breathlessly demanded Zack as he dashed in after inspection.

'At the Vet's,' said a soldier briefly.

Zack stumbled blindly down the stable alley. Then as the tears came, he ducked into Top Kick's stall and laid his head on that soft neck and wept.

The bay horse was puzzled. He had never before heard any sound like this smothered sobbing. He nuzzled the grief-stricken black soldier patiently to try to comfort him.

'Don't be so cut up, Zack,' said the corporal. 'The Vet goin' fix him up.'

'He ain't goin' come back,' wailed Zack. 'I know he ain't.'

After a few days Zack returned to the stable with the news that Old Corky was better.

'And he whinnied at me! He ain't never done that in all his born life — Ol' Corky whinnied at me!' he cried, his eyes shining.

The men could hardly believe that the old horse had

Old Corky

broken a lifetime of silence to greet Zack. But the Vet said it was true.

In the days that followed Old Corky was reported 'about the same' and then there was no word of his condition. The colored soldiers got uneasy. Finally they descended upon the hospital.

When the men returned, they hung their heads and dragged their feet. The light had gone out of their eyes. They were a woe-begone-looking group.

'Ol' Corky's daid,' said Sergeant Joe, as he patted Top Kick after feeding him. The bay stopped munching oats and thrust his muzzle into the black hand.

So great was the feeling of Troop G's men that they insisted, individually and collectively, to both their troop and regimental commanders, that Old Corky's body be given to them for a proper burial. And they were so upset that they slighted most of their stable duties, except the care of the horses themselves. Nothing could make them neglect the animals.

'I'd say let them have the carcass,' the veterinary officer advised the colonel when they came to the stable. 'The whole outfit is demoralized; it's just because they loved Old Corky.'

So it came about that the old soldier horse had a military funeral. His body was laid on a caisson under a flag and followed the post band as it played a funeral march and slowly went over the hill.

Carrying Zack as the chief mourner, Top Kick walked slowly behind the creaking ammunition wagon and all that remained of his old friend.

The men of G troop on horses solemnly headed the procession. Officers and soldiers on horse were followed

Top Kick

by children on foot. Some had come merely out of curiosity, but they followed the procession with a new understanding of the relation between horses and the men who care for them. By the time the small knoll was reached, everyone was ready to pay homage to the grand old horse and to those who loved him.

On the grassy hillside a grave had been dug and Old Corky, newly shod and wearing a brand-new bridle, was placed standing in his last stall. The soldiers felt that the old charger would have preferred that position, which was typical of his long life of usefulness.

The colonel, by special request, told the history of Old Corky, his remarkable feats of bravery in the World War I, and his tricks and ways that had endeared him to his friends. A trumpeter sounded taps. Zack sobbed aloud as he turned away from the grave. Top Kick pawed the ground.

So Old Corky was buried with military honors on that hillside which has become the Animal Cemetery of Fort Riley — the place where favorite pets and beloved horses ever since have found their last resting-place.

When the men returned to work, they showed their appreciation of the funeral by cleaning up the stables and polishing saddles and equipment until they shone.

'It was them flowers the post children sent that got me,' sighed Zack. 'Lovin' him like I did an' I couldn't get nary a flower for 'im.'

'How come you couldn't?' asked Sergeant Joe, as he groomed Top Kick.

'All my pay's gone. That blanket what I tore up for Ol' Corky nicked me bad.'

'I 'magine Ol' Corky would a sight rather have his

Old Corky

legs warm an' milk inside 'im than sweet-smellin' posies,' sympathized the sergeant. 'All my extra money went for milk.'

'Them new shoes an' bridle the officers give 'im. They sure was nice,' sighed Zack. 'Ol' Corky put on high-falutin' airs when he got hisself buried, anyway. 'Twas a grand buryin'!'



11. RIVALRY OVER TOP KICK

IT WAS spring and the days were unusually warm. In spite of the temptation to loiter in the pleasant Kansas sunshine and grow lazy with 'spring fever,' the activity of the cavalry classes kept the stables a busy place.

Top Kick noticed each of the student mounts as he was led away and returned with sleek sides and a trimmer look. Jingo, especially, didn't like what had happened to him. He came back very much out of sorts. Finally it was the bay's turn.

At the veterinary hospital Top Kick was put into a stall and a humming piece of metal began moving over

Rivalry Over Top Kick

his body. Nasty business, being clipped! This was not a new experience to Top Kick, but he disliked it. Now, on this enticing spring day, it irritated him particularly. It frisked around his flanks; it buzzed under his barrel and tickled his ribs. Finally it crept into his ears and around his eyes and whiskers. This was the final straw. Top Kick shut his eyes and reared.

'You poor darling,' he heard a sweet voice say. 'I don't wonder you hate it!'

Top Kick brought his front feet down quickly and opened his eyes wide.

Before him stood a tall, seventeen-year-old girl with big gray eyes full of concern. But those eyes were red. She had been crying.

Top Kick's interest in girls or women had gone no farther than tolerating their attentions. To him they were creatures with shrill voices whose pats on his sensitive nose were apt to hurt. He always had got away from them as quickly as possible.

But as he looked at Major Miller's daughter, his gaze grew softer. Her dewy eyes became brighter.

'Oh, you sweetheart,' she exclaimed and went straight to him. She put her arms about his head and her face down on his neck.

'Oh, Miss Muggins!' cried Zack in alarm. 'He's a new hoss an' ain't seen any gals.'

The man who had been clipping the colt drew his breath in sharply. Her twin brother went toward her, but the veterinary officer motioned not to disturb the two.

After several minutes, when the girl patted him lovingly and Top Kick arched his neck to show he liked it,

Top Kick

the officer said quietly, 'You see, Muggins, there are other horses besides Sandy Jim.'

She peeked out from behind Top Kick's brown head and her tears began to fall. But she continued to hug Top Kick.

'Sandy Jim isn't suffering now. He's all over the attacks, you know,' said Nason, trying in big-brother fashion to console her.

'But he is blind! For two years we've been afraid he'd suffer permanently from that moon blindness. And now you say he'll never see again!' said Muggins, her voice breaking.

She moved away from Top Kick, who stepped forward and stretched out his neck to nuzzle her shoulder.

'See, Top Kick knows you're worrying about your horse, Muggins. He's trying to comfort you.'

Muggins petted the friendly head and said: 'It breaks my heart to see Sandy Jim in his stall. All the fun has gone out of him. He was getting to be such a grand jumper, too, and I was so proud of him.'

'You sure did fine with 'im, miss, ever since he was a colt,' said Zack. 'Now that he come into his pride it's too bad you goin' lose 'im. It sure is bad, Miss Muggins!'

'He seems so lonely sometimes. He whinnies and paws the ground. Don't you think he'd like to go outside, even if he can't see?' the girl asked.

'You mean you want to ride him?' asked the officer. 'He's apt to be uncertain in his footing, but I guess you might try him. Not today, though! He's still out of condition.'

While they were talking, the man finished clipping

Rivalry Over Top Kick

Top Kick. As the loose hair was brushed off, the bay colt shook himself. He felt cool now, pleasantly cool!

In the days that followed, Muggins and Nason slipped into Top Kick's stable frequently. They would take apples and carrots to their blind pet, and stop by to see their new friend. Munching the treat they brought him, the bay would perk up his ears and listen as they talked over Sandy Jim's pitiful condition. When the girl's voice broke, he would put his soft muzzle against her as if to comfort her. The two seemed drawn to each other.

Leading Top Kick to the stables from class one day, Zack stopped to watch a big roan horse who came toward them.

'Great Scot in the mornin'!' exclaimed Zack. 'Is my eyes foolin' me? Never saw a hoss act thataway before!'

The horse picked his feet up high off the ground at each step, wobbled uncertainly from side to side, and his ears lay back in a threatening manner. He crouched low when he heard a strange sound and seemed afraid of everything.

'Miss Muggins an' Sandy Jim!' cried Zack as they came nearer.

The girl hopped lightly to the ground and led the roan over to Top Kick and Zack.

'How're we doing, Zack?' she asked sadly.

Zack took a big breath. 'Well, you're ridin' him, ain't you, miss? Ain't that somethin'?'

'I suppose so, but he was so full of life and pep, and now he's so scared.'

'The exercise do him good, Miss Muggins. He do look better,' Zack offered hopefully.

Top Kick

Top Kick, poking his nose into her riding-coat pockets, where he had learned he could find sugar, brought a smile to her face.

'This is my blind darling, Top Kick,' she said as she gave him a lump. 'Be nice to him.'

Top Kick reached out a friendly muzzle, but the roan edged away. Top Kick nickered softly in his throat, but Sandy Jim pulled hard on his reins to avoid him.

'Why is Sandy so unsociable, Zack?' she asked. 'Top Kick's so sweet to him, too.'

'He been sick a long time, miss. He forgets how to be friends. You just keep a-workin' with 'im!'

Weeks went by, the school year was drawing to a close. Top Kick continued to carry a different student officer every day, but all of them were getting expert in horsemanship. They had gone over low jumps, climbed the steep sides of bluffs, used the slides frequently, and had covered the entire countryside of Fort Riley with ease and speed. Top Kick was getting to be a real Army horse.

It was not until toward graduation week, when he had not been ridden for some time because the officers were taking exams, that Top Kick saw Muggins and her blind horse again.

One day Zack had taken Top Kick to the blacksmith's. When a foot was picked up, the colt watched curiously without making any fuss. After the frog was thoroughly clean and the hoof trimmed, a shoe was carefully fitted and nailed in place.

'Think you're pretty smart, don't you, Top Kick?' said Muggins to the horse, stepping high in new shoes.

The bay's ears perked up and he looked at her side-

Rivalry Over Top Kick

wise. He lifted his forefeet as if he were dancing a cakewalk. Her laughter bubbled up and spilled over.

'It sure is good to hear you laugh again, Miss Muggins,' said Zack.

'Top Kick, are you so proud of your new shoes you won't even look at me?' she asked.

The horse edged nearer to her as she went along beside him. Although he seemed to be showing off his new shoes, he was really getting used to the weight of them on his feet.

'Please let me lead him, Zack,' coaxed Muggins.

'A student's mount! No, missy!'

'Please, please, Zack.'

'No, I can't do it! Sorry, missy! How's Sandy Jim?' he added, hoping to get her mind off Top Kick.

'I rode him just now, but he still stumbles terribly. Do you think he'll ever trot again?'

Her distress disturbed the colored man. 'Sure, sure he will, miss. Just keep a-tryin',' he said quickly.

When they reached the stables, Muggins had to pet and fondle Top Kick before he went inside. The Negro waited patiently.

'Oh, Zack,' she said suddenly with a little gasp, 'saddle Top Kick for me. Please! Just let me get on his back once.'

'Does you mean Top Kick?' he laughed. 'No, ma'am! Ain't no girl been on that hoss's back since he done come.'

At length she persuaded him.

'Little missy, you sure got a way with you,' he chuckled. 'You ain't goin' ride him now, mind you. I's just goin' bridle and saddle him so you can sit on him a minute.'

Top Kick

As he gave her a leg up, she sprang lightly into the saddle and gathered up the reins. Top Kick gave a snort of surprise. With a bound he was off!

Away flew the bay horse down the road. All of his pent-up energy, which had had little outlet these days, was put into this wild gallop. His feet scarcely touched the ground. Faster and faster he raced.

But Top Kick was not running from fright. He did not lose his head. He was simply enjoying this burst of freedom. So in spite of his speed, he found and followed the bridle path.

Gradually he became conscious of two legs against his sides and a small weight in the saddle. He felt the reins held by his girl rider and they reluctantly told him the message, 'Slower, slower.' Never had he carried such a light rider, but her reins grew firmer and her knees pressed him. He slackened his pace.

'Top Kick, what a honey you are!' her voice cried in pure delight. 'What a ride! But we've got to go back or they will never let me have you again.'

As they slowly neared the stables, they were met by a very indignant young man in civilian riding-clothes.

'And what do you mean by riding my horse?' he demanded furiously. 'I thought girls weren't allowed to ride student mounts on this post.'

'Your horse, indeed!' exploded Muggins. 'Civilians, who may call themselves riding gentlemen,' she added sarcastically, 'aren't allowed to ride Army horses, either,' and she pushed Top Kick past him to go to the stables.

'Take Top Kick quick,' said Muggins to Zack; 'and don't scold, now,' she whispered, as the young man came up puffing.

Rivalry Over Top Kick

The girl looked him over — tall, good-looking, with eyes that twinkled in spite of his sternness. But Army girls can see little to admire in civilians. Her lip curled.

He saw a lithe, tall, black-haired girl with high color and unusual beauty. But girls disturbed and upset him! Top Kick and Zack looked from one to the other in amazement.

'Well, I shall report to Major Miller that you rode my horse!' he finally spat out.

'Go ahead and do it! And I hope he kicks you off the post for your impudence.'

'He won't kick me off! I've just come in from riding in Manhattan — that's why I'm wearing these clothes — but when I get to my quarters I'll put a uniform on and see him at once. I'm Lieutenant Bayley, and Top Kick was assigned to me yesterday.'

'*Please* don't tell Dad I rode Top Kick without permission,' said Muggins meekly, but with a sly smile.

'Good Heavens!' exclaimed the lieutenant. 'You're not Muggins Miller!'

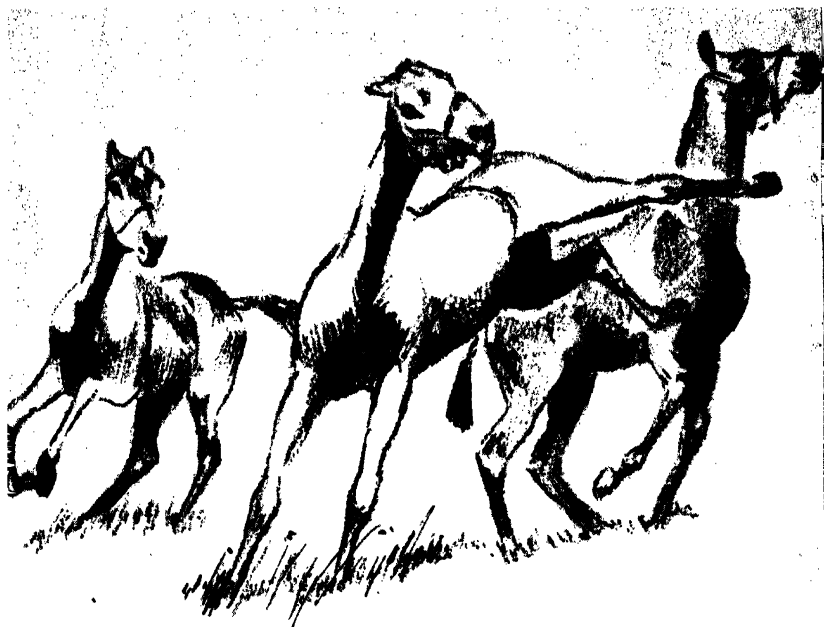
She nodded. 'Muggins to my friends; Miss Margaret Miller to you!' she added sharply.

'Please don't tell your father how rude I was to you.'

Top Kick nudged the girl for sugar. 'That's my horse,' reminded the lieutenant.

'We'll keep this affair to ourselves,' cried Muggins. 'We have never met each other,' she added and strode off.

The young officer whistled between his teeth, looked after her in complete surprise, and then turned to make the acquaintance of his new mount.



12. TOP KICK LEADS THE BLIND

TOP KICK stood quietly beside Zack and looked long and inquiringly out of his big brown eyes at the new officer. His nostrils quivered slightly.

Lieutenant Bayley looked just as intently at him.

'Beautiful head set firmly on good sloping shoulders, excellent-shaped barrel and perfect legs! Gorgeous animal!' said the officer with an indrawn breath of appreciation.

Bayley reached out a friendly hand, wiggling it temptingly, and Top Kick nibbled at it.

As he stepped nearer, the bay horse offered his nose to be petted and the man stroked it, making pleasant clicking sounds.

'You sure knows hosses,' said Zack, 'an' he's the best

'Top Kick Leads the Blind

on the post. Folkses don't know it yet, but I'm tellin' you.'

'And that fool of a girl shan't ride him and spoil him,' Bayley declared.

At his tone Top Kick moved 'uneasily. He had not quite accepted the man yet.

'Oh, she can ride, Lieutenant. That girl knows hosses too,' said Zack.

'Well, I give you orders not to let her have this horse. And don't forget it.'

'Yes, sah,' said Zack meekly, leading Top Kick to his stall.

The Cavalry School's regular course was over for the year. But since there was a war in Europe and National Defense was considered important, a summer session began at once, and Bayley was one of the new student officers. Although he was busy with studies and classes, he found time to feed, water, and even rub down his horse.

'It's the only way to really get to know Top Kick,' he told Zack.

He picked up the animal's feet, patted him often, and made much of him. Top Kick responded as he always did to attention; he showed his appreciation like a gentleman.

Jingo watched all this from his stall and whinnied, but all he got was a kind word and a stray pat or two.

Besides the work in the equitation class, Top Kick was given the longeing lessons again, going around and around Bayley to supple his legs, get greater freedom to his movements, and change his paces instantly and smoothly. The commands were given firmly and kindly, so Top Kick never hesitated to obey. Not since the days

Top Kick

with the training sergeant at Front Royal had the bay been in such good hands. The two learned to understand each other.

Soon the young lieutenant was riding him cross-country, up and down hills and over smooth and rough places. So well did Top Kick hop over big boulders and logs that the man asked permission to start him on jumping lessons, but the equitation instructor was definite in his refusal.

'In the fall the regular jumping classes will begin,' he added. 'If you and your horse show you're good enough by then, maybe I'll let you join them.'

One day Bayley found a piece of sugar on the floor outside of Top Kick's stall.

'What does this mean?' he demanded of Zack. 'Who's been feeding Top Kick sugar?'

'Miss Muggins and her brother, sah,' the Negro answered.

'But didn't I tell you to keep that girl away from my horse?'

'No, sah. You said she can't ride 'im, that's all.'

'Well, I don't approve of feeding horses sugar. It's not good for their digestion.'

'Oh, Lieutenant, she ain't got school in summer. Every day she works and works with a blind hoss an' he ain't doin' so good. Don't say she got to stay away from Top Kick. She sure dotes on Top Kick.'

'Well, no more sugar!' Bayley said emphatically, as he scratched the spot under the brown jaws.

As the days grew hotter and the equitation class was dropped for a while, the horses spent much of the time in the pasture, where it was cool and pleasant under the

Top Kick Leads the Blind

trees and the flies were less bothersome. When Muggins and Zack brought Sandy Jim to the gate one morning, Top Kick trotted over to them.

The bay started nosing for sugar in the girl's riding-coat pockets. The big roan didn't turn his head toward Top Kick, he just stood waiting. But his ears were perked up, listening to her voice.

'Carrots and apples in the stable, Zack,' said Muggins. 'But Top Kick can have a teeny-weeny bit of sugar here.'

The black face grinned and looked away. He wouldn't see the sugar.

After Zack took the saddle back to the stable, Muggins stayed in the pasture a long time, petting and fondling the two horses. She led Sandy Jim, stumbling and groping his way along the fences and between the trees, to make him familiar with his new surroundings. Top Kick followed close behind as if he were helping. When she finally left, the two animals were close together.

Much of the time Top Kick spent in running and playing with the other horses in the pasture. They pounded up the slopes and among the trees and raced around and around. He and Jingo were always together in the group, but the gray horse was a rough playmate. When Top Kick grew tired of these wild antics, he looked for Sandy Jim, who usually stood alone and dejected beside a tree.

Nickering gently, Top Kick coaxed the blind horse to follow him. But Sandy Jim refused to budge. Then the bay went back to him, leaned against him while they switched flies with their tails. After an hour or so, Sandy put his head on his new friend's flank when he stirred to

Top Kick

leave him. Moving cautiously step by step so that his head would still touch him, Top Kick got the blind horse to a place where the grass was sweet and luxuriant. When his head went down to graze, Sandy's did also.

For several days Top Kick led his blind companion about in this way, but soon Sandy learned the sound of his hoofbeats. He would whinny as Top Kick raced by in his play with Jingo and the others or when Top Kick ran to meet him. So as he learned the pasture, the clop-clop of Top Kick's feet close to him was enough to draw him on. The bay showed him where the salt mixture was and how to drink from the trough. Now the stableman who came to water and feed the blind horse every day was relieved of some of his duties.

But Jingo seemed to be jealous of the attention Top Kick gave to his new friend. Biting his tail, knocking against him, and in every way possible pestering the horse who couldn't see, he trailed along after the two. The teasing of the gray grew into real meanness and led the other horses to abuse Sandy, too. The situation was growing serious.

Top Kick was slow to anger. He protected Sandy chiefly by getting between the tormentor and his blind friend and leading him into corners where he would not be bothered.

But one day Jingo and the others were especially hateful and poor Sandy Jim was bumped, pushed around, and nipped sharply on the flank. Top Kick whirled around and around him. But Jingo got to him, squealed, and let both feet fly into Sandy's face.

That squeal saved Sandy, who dodged back and so missed a vicious kick on his head. But it caught him on

Top Kick Leads the Blind

the shoulder and he cried out in pain. The bay's patience was exhausted. He ran at Jingo, who jumped nimbly aside. Top Kick caught himself and plunged at him again. On and on they flew, these two pals since Front Royal days.

At last Top Kick caught Jingo, bit him severely on the rump! As the gray squealed and whirled, the bay pounced on him, knocking him flat. Top Kick stood over the slashing legs so that he could not get up, although he tried again and again. Finally, when Jingo grew quiet, Top Kick stepped back. When the gray got to his feet, the two went back to Sandy Jim. But never again did Jingo or any other horse tease the blind horse. Unmolested, Top Kick was allowed to show Sandy how to get along without his sight.

Muggins watched Sandy Jim's progress. 'Top Kick, you're wonderful, bringing Sandy back to himself. See how he's learning to let sounds take the place of his eyes! He's more alert and life is brighter!'

Lieutenant Bayley came to the pasture often. Top Kick learned to watch for him, and whenever he heard his peculiar whistle, he ran to the gate. After receiving the petting which he always expected from him and after the saddle was put on his back, he carried the officer on long jaunts. Each appreciated the other more and more. The affection between them was growing rapidly.

One morning it was Muggins and some other girls who brought saddles and a stableman. Several of the curious horses who came to the gate were caught and mounted. Top Kick found himself leading the group with Muggins on his back. She was as light as a feather and he danced along the bridle path.

Top Kick

'I'm leader of the Mounted Girl Scout troop,' whispered Muggins in his ear. 'It's a swell excuse, darling, and at last I'm allowed to ride you. So act your prettiest for me!'

Then Top Kick was ridden every day by both Muggins and Lieutenant Bayley. But though the officer was suspicious, he had no direct proof that someone else was using his horse. And Muggins knew the school schedule well enough to know when it was safe to ride Top Kick without being seen by the one man on the post she avoided.

But one day the troop was in the Girl Scouts' hut, which was in the bottoms on the river bank, and the horses were unsaddled and tied to some trees near-by. After sniffing at the tempting green grass and pawing the ground impatiently for some time, Top Kick fussed with his halter-shank until he got it untied. The grass was good and he wandered farther and farther away.

A sudden shower with lightning flashes and thunderbolts, which always alarmed him, sent him scurrying to his pasture. There against a tree crouched Sandy Jim, crying pitifully deep in his throat and so frightened he could hardly stand.

Top Kick shook the gate with his teeth. He ran along the fence, but it was four feet high. He stepped on his halter rope and fell head over heels. He picked himself up and looked at the fence again. It was made of wicked wire with a wooden rail at the top.

Sandy Jim heard his hoofbeats and whinnied to him, whinnied with a clear tone of distress. Top Kick called back encouragingly.

With Sandy's cry ringing in his ears again, the bay

Top Kick Leads the Blind

backed away from the fence, charged that four feet of wire, leapt into the air! He was over, landing securely on his feet. He ran nimbly to the blind horse and led him to the protected side of a hill, where he comforted and nuzzled him as rain pelted them.

The next day Muggins met Lieutenant Bayley as he rode Top Kick.

'Where did you find him?' she cried in excitement and relief.

'Find him? What do you mean?' asked the officer coolly.

'Oh, Top Kick's been lost. I've hunted and hunted for him. I haven't slept a wink all night and I've worried myself sick over him!' she said.

'Who lost him, and why should *you* worry over him?' he demanded.

'I did, and it was my fault, and I love Top Kick,' she answered, all in one breath.

Before he could utter one word of rebuke, she added hastily, 'Where'd you get him?'

'In the pasture, of course,' he said curtly.

'When?'

'I've ridden him every day this week.'

'Yesterday?'

'Yes, right after the rain. He came trotting to the gate with your blind horse at his heels. But look here, young lady ——'

'Lieutenant Bayley, do you know what that means?' she interrupted. 'Top Kick jumped the fence to get to my Sandy when it was raining.'

'No, he couldn't. He's never been taught to jump.'

'Well, he did it all by himself and without any lessons.'

Top Kick

Lots of horses jump fences, but not such big bad ones as that!

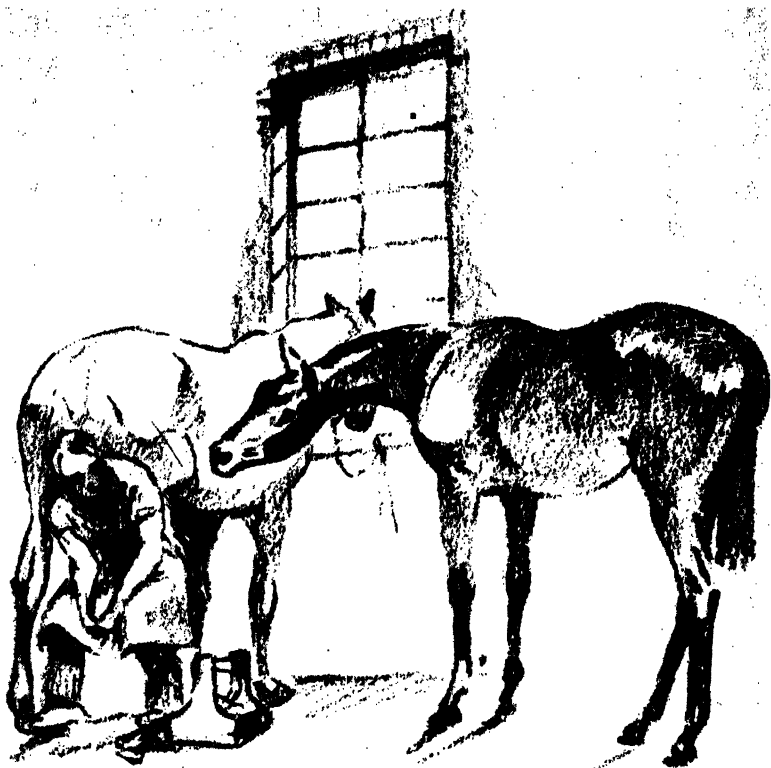
'Now I can get permission to jump him!' exclaimed Bayley with shining eyes. 'Isn't he a grand horse?'

Both forgot their antagonism somewhat as they boasted about Top Kick and compared the points each had learned about him.

The bay liked this petting from his two admirers and nuzzled one and then the other.

But when Muggins turned to leave them, the officer said sternly but kindly, 'After losing my horse, you can't have him again, you know.'

'Oh, yeah?' she answered impudently as she dashed away. 'Ask your riding instructor, Big Boy.'



13. THE RIM ROCK IN THE STORM

THE horses now spent the heat of the day in the stables and late afternoon and night in the pasture. One morning, Top Kick, who was always curious about everything, discovered he had a loose front shoe. He shook his foreleg and rubbed his hoof against the side of his stall. He fussed and fussed with the annoying shoe, but no one noticed it. Only when Zack fed and watered him did he forget it.

The next morning he investigated it again. Then he started work on the door which he had opened once be-

Top Kick

fore. Nosing and pushing against the bolt, he finally shot it back. Top Kick pushed the door; it swung wide and out he walked.

Straight to the blacksmith shop went Top Kick with the loose shoe clumping as he stepped. Soldiers who saw him tried to catch him, but he jumped nimbly out of their reach and continued on his way. He met some youngsters who called to him enticingly and held out candy. He edged nearer and gingerly picked up a piece from a flat little hand, then was off again.

The door of the blacksmith shop was open and in went the bay horse. Once every six weeks he had been here to have his shoes changed, so this was a familiar place to him. For a time he stood unnoticed. The farrier was fitting a shoe on a big draft horse.

Top Kick became impatient and moved about. 'All right! All right!' said the man, without looking up. 'Didn't I tell you not to bring me any more horses today, Sergeant?'

Top Kick waited awhile longer and then went to the farrier and nudged his arm.

'Don't bother me! Can't you see I'm busy?' said the man impatiently and glanced up. 'Hello, Top Kick,' he laughed, and as he looked for the soldier who had brought him, he whistled in amazement.

'What did you come here for? Time for new shoes?' he asked. As he caught sight of the dangling shoe, he exclaimed: 'Well, I'll be darned! You have brains, Top Kick. What a story to tell my horseshoeing classes! Hey, come see Top Kick,' he called to his assistant.

There was quite an audience by the time the shoe was

The Rim Rock in the Storm

secure again. Among the onlookers were Muggins and Nason.

'I'll take Top Kick back to the stable,' offered Nason.

But the bay horse was more interested in Muggins. He pulled away from the boy to get his muzzle on her shoulder.

'Oh, you darling,' she said affectionately, stopping to stroke the horse's lovely head.

The sun shone brightly, the air was crisp. Now that his shoe was fixed, he could caper and jump and play. He had no idea of being led quietly back to the shadowy stable.

As soon as they started on again, Top Kick gave a quick jerk and was free. He ran off, side-stepping, arching his neck and watching the two Millers mischievously. When they slowly approached him, he would dash off again and then come back to them. This was a new game — this game of tag. Top Kick enjoyed it to the fullest, his eyes dancing and his feet skipping over the ground. He would even take time to roll on the ground, and when they were ready to grab him, he would jump up and dodge away.

'Trying to lose my horse again?' cried Lieutenant Bayley sharply, as he ran up to the girl and her brother.

'No, trying to catch him. If you'd watch his feet more carefully, he wouldn't have a loose shoe and be running around to get it fixed!' Muggins snapped back.

'I don't see any loose shoe,' said Bayley, looking at Top Kick.

'There's the new one,' answered the girl, pointing to a brown front foot. 'He got out of his stall without any

Top Kick

help and went to the blacksmith all by himself and got himself fixed up!' she boasted.

Bayley's eyes shone as he thought of the cleverness of his horse.

'But he wasn't turned out from the blacksmith shop to go back to the stables alone?' he asked sarcastically.

'He got away from me, Lieutenant,' admitted Nason. 'I'm sorry.'

'Well, why don't you catch him?' Bayley demanded gruffly.

'Why don't you catch him yourself, smarty? He's your horse,' retorted Muggins.

'All right, watch me!' and he blew Top Kick's special whistle.

The bay horse pranced over to the officer, but just as Bayley reached for his headstall, he jerked away and was off again. Now another had come to join his game of tag! Again and again the young lieutenant tried to catch him while Muggins taunted the man unmercifully. Even Nason, who was an especially tolerant boy, begged her to 'lay off.'

Finally Bayley with an embarrassed grin got a pan of oats and held it out temptingly, while Muggins made fun of such tactics.

Top Kick came nearer, sniffed, turned quickly. With his hind feet he neatly kicked the pan high into the air.

Muggins roared with laughter. Then she saw the deathlike pallor of the lieutenant's face. A laugh caught in her throat.

'Did he kick you?' she gasped, running to him.

'No, no!' he sputtered, trying to get over his surprise. He added apologetically, 'Well, I guess you ——'

The Rim Rock in the Storm

'It's no fun having horses' feet so close to your face,' interrupted Muggins. 'You might have been hurt,' she added, with concern in her voice.

Her tact and her sudden interest in him were as surprising as Top Kick's actions. As he tried to get his wits together, Nason deftly caught the bay horse as he came up to see why he wasn't chased.

As the three started off together, leading Top Kick, Muggins said, 'Did you get permission to jump Top Kick?'

'I should say I did! His going over the four-foot fence cinched that!' Bayley answered with enthusiasm.

'Still mad at me because I rode him?' she teased.

'Well, you did fix it so I can start his jumping lessons tomorrow,' he admitted grudgingly, but with a smile.

'Mad at Top Kick?' she persisted.

'Of course not. He was only playing.'

'So was I,' she laughed as they parted.

The next morning, Bayley held the long cavesson rein while Top Kick went over small obstacles. Gradually he increased them in height until the horse was jumping three feet. The willing animal capered around, not at all bothered by the jumps, but taking them in his stride. He was so full of life and so anxious to please that he seemed to enjoy the work. He would sail over the jump and then look expectantly at the officer, who would pet him or give him a carrot. When he was coaxed to go through the chute of jumps all by himself, he would do it easily, confidently, and would arch his neck teasingly as he came up to Bayley for praise. Top Kick was learning fast these days!

But at the stables, it was not so pleasant for the bay horse. Jingo in the stall next to his was getting more and

Top Kick

more bad-tempered. He kicked, squealed, and made a terrible disturbance most of the time. But worst of all, he was striking with his front feet again. Top Kick was uneasy over his old friend.

When inspection time came, one day, Zack and the other stablemen had the equipment and stalls in splendid condition, all the horses except Jingo curried to perfection. Even the two old horses that they were afraid would leave because of old age had had their bulging eyes sponged out well and their coats groomed closer to make them look younger. But that was the time Jingo set about to kick his stall down.

'You's a fool of a hoss, you old jug-head!' said Zack to Jingo. 'You's sure goin' get IC [inspected and condemned] and we's goin' lose you!' But his tone belied his words. Bad as he had grown to be, the Negro didn't want to part with Jingo.

As the colonel and two other officers entered, the colored men were jittery. Jingo's hoofs could be heard a mile away as they ripped into the sides of his stall.

'He's just loco,' suggested one officer. 'Always mean; now he's impossible.'

'Has the veterinary officer seen him?' asked the colonel.

'Yes, sah,' answered Zack.

The noise Jingo made was deafening.

'Did he look at his teeth?' questioned the colonel.

'No, sah. That hoss ain't goin' let nobody touch his head.'

'Well, he's going to the hospital,' said the colonel emphatically.

'Yes, sah,' said Zack as the Negroes approached the animal, rolling their eyes with fear.

The Rim Rock in the Storm

Top Kick trembled from head to foot as the men, directed and assisted by the officers, struggled with Jingo. How the gray fought — kicking, striking, and squealing! At last he was bound and blindfolded, but it took six men to force him out of his stall and through the door of the stable.

Later, Top Kick saw his old pal return, subdued and groggy. Poor Jingo was a sick horse. His ulcerated tooth had been pulled!

‘Good old Jingo!’ said Zack sympathetically. ‘Tooth-ache sure make anybody act bad.’

Gradually the gray became himself again. Life in the stable became pleasant once more to all around him.

Meanwhile Muggins continued to ride Top Kick.

Late one afternoon toward fall, after Jingo had quite recovered, she was leading her Girl Scout troop on horseback when suddenly Top Kick began to sniff the air in a peculiar manner. An off color faintly replaced the sunlight, a reddish tinge seemed to cover the earth as far as eye could see.

The girls tried to convince Muggins it was nothing. But she ordered an about-face. They started for the stables.

There was an odd silence over everything. No bird twittered, no rabbit or prairie dog could be seen. The stillness was oppressive. It hung over the riders in a way that seemed threatening. The girls and horses felt it and did their utmost to get home quickly.

The sun was now covered by a strange reddish veil.

‘I know. It’s a dust storm,’ said Muggins suddenly. ‘Girls, I can’t go by the pasture without knowing Sandy

Top Kick

Jim is protected. A bad dust storm can kill a horse. I read that in the Sunday newspaper.'

'But how about yourself and Top Kick?' protested one.

'Oh, we'll get in. He's fast. I'll stop only a minute at the pasture and you girls go on. If I don't get back, tell Lieutenant Bayley to hunt up his horse. Now hurry!'

At last she found Sandy Jim standing alone, puzzled and bewildered and whinnying for the other horses. He was on the other side of the pasture from the gate and in a wide, open space. Muggins climbed over the fence and ran to him. She led him to a hollow, where a thick bush screened him well.

Top Kick stamped his feet impatiently and moved restlessly. He whinnied to the girl.

'I'm coming, darling,' she called.

A huge, oddly colored cloud was whirling toward them from the northwest, a cloud that stretched as far as horse and girl could see.

Muggins sprang into the saddle, and away they went until they came up on a stony barren hill. Only another half-mile to go!

Then the storm swept down upon them. The wind hit them, almost knocking the horse's feet from under him. Sand and grit pounded against them. He instinctively closed his eyes and coughed from the dust in his throat and nostrils. Day became almost as black as night. A terrible roar deafened them.

Like a mad demon the storm grabbed the horse and girl, whipped them about, jerked them backward and whined and growled. It drove dust and dirt into their mouths, noses, ears, and eyes, almost blinding and choking them. Still Muggins kept her seat.

The Rim Rock in the Storm

She pulled Top Kick to the right and urged him forward. But he hesitated, unwilling to go in the direction she wanted. Weaving and battling to keep his feet, he finally obeyed.

But now the storm seemed to confuse him, too. He plunged ahead on a level stretch. He must get her out of this whirlpool of sand and dirt.

Suddenly he slid on all four feet, trying to stop. The rim rock! Unable to keep from going over the edge, Top Kick jumped. With a shattering jar he and Muggins landed on the sharp rocky bank ten feet below.

For several minutes the two lay motionless but secure on the ledge instead of having rolled disastrously to the bottom. The storm beat down upon them. Then slowly, fighting the dust out of his eyes, nose, and mouth, Top Kick stumbled to his feet. There was a nasty pain in his fetlock.

But Muggins lay still. Top Kick breathed softly into her face. He rubbed his muzzle along her sleeve and against her neck where he touched blood. He nudged her head gently, but she did not move.

As soon as the dust storm was over, Lieutenant Bayley and other riders went out in search of Muggins and Top Kick.

They found Top Kick standing quietly watching her. The hoofmarks on the rim rock showed them that only his quickness had saved her from being killed.

'What a horse!' said Bayley. Top Kick leaned down to sniff her again. 'Yes, and what a girl!' added the man to himself.

They carried her back to the post, with Top Kick following close behind. At the hospital, the horse pawed

Top Kick

the ground and whinnied when they took the unconscious girl through the door. Bayley tried to pacify him.

'I know how you feel, old boy!' he said soothingly. 'I'm all cut up over her, too.'

Muggins had long weeks ahead of her when she couldn't ride. Top Kick was kept indoors, too, to cure his fetlock while Fort Riley buzzed with his praise.

'Ain't Top Kick smart?' Zack again asked his audience around the bay's stall.



14. THE COYOTE HUNT

As soon as Top Kick's fetlock was well, it was time for him to join the jumping class. Some of the horses were 'herd-bound' and didn't want to leave the others to jump by themselves. But Top Kick had become so sensitive to the aids and so anxious to please the lieutenant that he left the group willingly.

Starting with poles lying on the tanbark floor, the jumps were raised gradually to three and one half feet. The young officer on Top Kick leaned well forward until the jump was completed so his weight interfered as little as possible with the bay's action to get over. Top Kick scarcely felt the hands that held the reins, they were so soft and light.

'Head up! Chest up!' the instructor would tell Bayley. 'Keep your eyes on that window in the roof as you go over.'

Top Kick

To Top Kick and Lieutenant Bayley this jumping business was pure play. No bars were too high to discourage the animal, and soon he did not even break his stride as he went over. He put on a beautiful performance with the young officer in the saddle and drew many admiring eyes to him.

Besides jumping every obstacle they could find outdoors, the horse and man joined paper chases and hunt rides.

The fifty-two thousand acres of rolling prairie which constitutes the Fort Riley Reservation is well suited for hunting. But the wind and dryness make it hard for the hounds to get a scent, so a 'drag' containing something with an odor which the hounds can follow is dragged behind a horse. The soldier who lays the drag chooses a course so that no rider needs to jump unless he wants to, but can go through the gates or around the obstacles.

But Top Kick with Bayley up took all the jumps. He caught the excitement of the chase after the baying hounds, the joy of running with other horses. He seemed to know Bayley's pleasure in the sport, too.

'Top Kick's the jumpin'est hoss that ever joined up with this here man's army,' said Zack to Lieutenant Bayley as he rubbed down the bay. He had watched the drag hunt that day.

'I wish I could ride him in a real hunt after a fox!' exclaimed the young officer.

'No foxes in Kansas, sah!' said Zack. 'Sometimes they scare up a coyote. I heard tell t'other day some farmers say coyotes been gettin' to their sheep and chickens. Maybe they goin' to be a coyote hunt soon.'

The Coyote Hunt

'What wouldn't I give to ride Top Kick in a live hunt!' exclaimed Bayley.

A few days later, when the young officer came jubilantly into the stable, he found Zack saddling Top Kick and the bay stamping impatiently.

'He's raring to go coyote-hunting, isn't he?' laughed Bayley. 'But how did you happen to have him ready, Zack? Did you guess I wouldn't miss it?'

The Negro hung his head. 'I hates to tell you, sah!' he said, 'but Major Andrews ordered your hoss for hisself. He says if he likes him, he'll keep him for class work and all the time.'

For a moment there was silence. Then he added, 'He ain't old Cavalry.'

It had happened! Too many admiring eyes had followed Top Kick's work in the riding hall and outdoors.

Lieutenant Bayley put an arm around the brown neck. 'I've been ranked out of my horse!' he said, with a break in his voice. 'You can't help but please the major today, Top Kick, and then I'll have lost you for good.' The brown head nuzzled against him.

'Ain't you goin' ride in the hunt, sah?' asked Zack. 'Here's Jingo; he can jump.'

Bayley shook his head.

'Ain't you goin' see Top Kick an' how he's doin'?' insisted the Negro.

'That's right, I've got to watch Top Kick,' said Bayley. 'Saddle Jingo for me. What kind of jumper is he?'

'Jingo's a fool of a hoss, sah. But he can jump if he wants to. He ain't bad since they pulled his tooth, sah.'

Everyone on the post turned out for the coyote hunt that fine morning. All the post horses had found riders,

Top Kick

and people afoot and in cars came to watch the ride. Glossy sides of horses gleamed, boots and saddles shone, more 'pink' coats appeared than usual. Top Kick, carrying his new stout major, could sense the tingling excitement that held the crowd silent.

Jingo, with the young lieutenant on his back, sidled over near the bay. Bayley looked the girls over to see if Muggins was among them. Evidently it was too soon after her accident to ride in such a strenuous hunt as this promised to be.

Impatiently the crowd of hunters milled about. Top Kick caught the eagerness of both horses and riders to be off. This promised to be fun!

Over the rise came the colonel in a bright red coat and riding a white horse. Two young officers, his assistants or whips, also in 'pinks' or red coats, followed. And about them, with tails waving, were the black-and-white-spotted hounds. Top Kick stepped about uneasily.

'He never gets used to hunting hounds,' murmured the lieutenant. But he could not know that Top Kick had a reason for this dislike of dogs.

Crack! The whip's thong rang out like a pistol shot. Everyone stopped talking. A moment of silence as a thrill went over the hunting crowd! Reins were tightened, hats crammed down, and knees pushed gently. The horses were up on the bits and ready.

'Toot, a-toot,' blew the horn.

Top Kick trembled in anticipation as he heard the sound. The hounds started hunting and spread out across the field. The horses cantered after them.

An old dog led the pack of fifteen and a half couples, going about his work silently, too busy to make a fuss

The Coyote Hunt

about it. The young hounds gave tongue, yipping excitedly. Only a high note too far off the line would bring a low warning call from the old fellow.

Suddenly they drew a scent, certainly a coyote by the cry they set up. Then off they streamed in a line! The horn's silver notes sounded and the hunt was on.

Across a narrow ditch and up a hill, Top Kick went. The steady climb warmed his blood and he breathed deeply.

As he galloped across a level stretch of high grass, he could feel that his rider's weight was not well balanced and the reins were held nervously. Evidently the major was not a good rider.

The constant baying of the hounds drew Top Kick on. An odd sport to follow that sound! But the horse had learned that was the way to play it.

As his rider was not with him on the first jump, Top Kick showed nervousness. But he did his best over a rail fence and caught his balance quickly on the other side.

When he dodged another horse to avoid a collision, the major almost fell off. The reins were yanked sharply and hurt the horse's sensitive mouth. Bayley's indrawn breath near him showed his concern.

But as they sailed along over a wide, open space, the officer settled down in his seat and seemed to get the feel of his saddle. This was better. Jingo, carrying Bayley, ran beside them. The whole field was covered with riders and horses.

Top Kick jumped the post and rail without effort. He could feel his rider's pleasure as he relaxed somewhat from his stiff position.

This was no easy course, for the hunt had to follow the

Top Kick

whims of the coyote it was chasing. Through brambles and rough going, over streams and across ditches in the hardest places, dodging trees and over or around other obstacles, the trail went. Top Kick managed all this with the major still on his back.

All at once the pack grew uncertain. They milled around at the top of Battery Hill Slide. The coyote had left too faint a scent on that dry spot. The confusion gave a breather for the horses, who came up snorting and blowing from their gallop.

Jingo limped up the slope with Bayley leading him.

'Guess it's a stone in his foot,' said the young officer, lifting and probing the horse's foot.

'Oh, that Jingo is faking,' laughed another rider. 'When he gets lazy he pretends he's lame. Just push him hard!'

'How do you like the hunt, sir?' Bayley asked the major with a worried tone. He had been delayed by Jingo's lameness and had lost the officer on his bay for a time.

'A topping hunt, absolutely topping!' said the major enthusiastically. 'A very creditable mount, too,' he added.

The young lieutenant drew his breath in sharply. He was worried for fear Top Kick would perform poorly or have an accident; and yet he was worried when the horse pleased the man, for then he felt he could be certain to lose him.

'Jingo's a good horse,' said the major. 'You're lucky to have such a good horse.'

'Yes, sir,' said Bayley, who hadn't missed the inference. 'He's good if he isn't lame and will jump.'

The Coyote Hunt

As the major looked at him sharply he dropped his eyes and said, 'Good Jingo,' and patted the gray with vigor in front of the saddle.

Jingo reared straight up in the air.

'Hey, look out!' cried the major in alarm.

For a minute or two the animal pawed the air. Then down to earth came the forefeet, the gray horse astonishingly calm.

'Did you do that on purpose to show off your horsemanship to me?' demanded Major Andrews.

'No, sir,' stuttered Bayley. 'I've never ridden this horse before.'

'Well, I dare you to pat him in front of the saddle again,' taunted the major.

Bayley did as he was told and Jingo reared into the air a second time.

'There, you see!' exclaimed the major.

'I've heard Jingo has been a Bemmer Wild West Show horse, and that must be a trick he's been taught to do,' interrupted a captain. 'Bayley couldn't have known about it, Major,' he added.

'Trick or no trick, I wouldn't want any horse throwing his head in my face,' said the major. 'I prefer Top Kick.'

Bayley gave a gasp. 'More's the pity,' he muttered under his breath.

At last the hounds set up a great hue-and-cry and disappeared over the ridge. The riders saw a gray form slink through the valley and they pushed their horses down Battery Hill.

This slide worried Top Kick, as uncertain steps showed. But the major had caught the excitement of the

Top Kick

chase and kept urging him on. It was all the animal could do to get down, sliding and slipping, with the stout man's weight too far forward.

Bayley was watching Top Kick so intently he didn't keep a close enough rein on Jingo, who enjoyed throwing his riders when he could. At the bottom of the slide, the lieutenant suddenly found his mount had 'policed' him (or thrown him).

'Have an accident?' asked the friendly captain as he caught Jingo.

The young man picked himself up.

'Thunder, no!' said Bayley emphatically. 'That devilish horse did it on purpose.'

When the young officer had mounted Jingo again and started after the galloping horses, the gray bounded forward as though from a hidden spring. It was plain he had no lameness!

Now Jingo was showing what he could do with both speed and jumps. He fairly flew over the ground to catch the others and sailed over the biggest obstacles without hesitating, twisting his tail in a circle as he jumped.

Top Kick and the major had passed many of the horses, but still the bay was urged on. The bay showed his lack of trust in his rider by his close watch of the other horses, but the major was overconfident. Faster and faster Top Kick had to go. By a brilliant burst of speed, Jingo dashed up beside them. Neck and neck, Top Kick and Jingo ran together.

The next jump fairly rushed at the two horses. Jingo went over like a bird. Top Kick jumped as well as he could with his stout officer. He nearly stood on his head.

The Coyote Hunt

as he landed, but by some miracle he got his feet under him in time to save himself and his rider a nasty fall.

Up the slope the horses went, puffing hard. They descended the next hill much too fast. Before them was a bad ditch with a small creek flowing through it. Top Kick did not feel a steadying rein, the signal to slow up, as Jingo did. The major's knees only pushed harder, urging him on. The bay's officer had completely lost his head.

Top Kick jumped the stream with a mighty effort. But the earth crumbled under him as he sprang. He struck the opposite bank with a dull thud. For an instant he hung there, then began to slip back. He struggled madly for a foothold.

Top Kick almost made it. But a sharp jerk on the reins toppled him dizzily backward into the creek!

Luckily the water was deep enough to break their fall, so that neither the major nor Top Kick was hurt. But they got a thorough soaking.

As they clambered out, with the help of Lieutenant Bayley and the other riders, it was all the major could do to hide his humiliation and anger. Top Kick sensed the man's feelings as the red-faced rider painfully mounted again and seized the reins. The sensitive animal was trembling with fear from the accident. Bayley patted him gently to pacify him.

'Think you're all right, sir?' he asked anxiously.

'Quite all right,' said the major curtly, as he pulled Top Kick's head away from the lieutenant.

The hounds had lost the scent of the coyote in the creek. Vainly they searched for it.

'I'm keeping this horse,' said the major to the young

Top Kick

lieutenant. 'After I get through with him, he won't fall.'

The worst had happened!

Top Kick sighed wearily. Bayley's heart fell into his boots. Poor Top Kick! And the major not an experienced cavalryman, either!

At last the Master of the Hounds blew his horn. 'Gone away, gone away!' it said. The coyote hunt was over.



15. HIGH WATER

'It's a darned shame you lost him,' said Muggins to Lieutenant Bayley, as they met at Top Kick's stall one day where each had come to caress and fondle the animal.

'The major and he don't get along well, either,' said Bayley. 'That man will never understand or appreciate horses in spite of equitation lessons. He doesn't know a grand horse when he sees one and he doesn't realize how terribly he's handling him. It makes me sick!'

'I know — I've been watching them, too. A sensitive horse like Top Kick can be ruined easily. But the riding instructor keeps an eye on him.' Muggins's voice was sympathetic. 'Isn't there any way you can get him back?'

'Not a chance. On all the overnight rides and long marches I've hoped something would happen to give him to me. Major Andrews may not go on maneuvers next week, but it's too much to expect that I could get Top Kick.'

Top Kick

But that's exactly what came about.

'Top Kick, how come you know the lieutenant's goin' ride you?' asked Zack early one morning, as he fed him at daylight.

An hour later the Negro was putting a field saddle on the bay with the pockets packed and Bayley's equipment strapped on it.

He said: 'You're rarin' to go. How come you don't do that when you got to tote the major?'

Top Kick, with Lieutenant Bayley on his back, and Jingo carrying a big officer beside him, could hardly hold his gait down to a walk, so pleased was he to be carrying his friend again. And the bay horse knew his rider's delight by the way he sat in the saddle, gripped with his knees, and talked to him in undertones.

In columns of fours, horses and riders moved across country, following the colonel, who set the pace and picked the route. When the footing was good and the ground level, the column often moved at a trot or a gallop, but did not keep to one pace long.

'Did you ever see such a horse?' Bayley asked the big officer. 'Top Kick begins to trot before I give him the signal. He must be watching for the colonel's arm to come up for change in pace!'

'You like that horse, don't you? Keep your wits about you during these maneuvers and you might manage to get him back for good.'

Halts were made for ten minutes every hour when the officers dismounted and tightened girths or adjusted equipment. At noon a longer stop allowed the men and horses to eat their lunch.

By early afternoon a camp site was chosen on a gentle

High Water

slope. What a hustle and bustle that place became, as preparations were made for the night! Top Kick found himself beside Jingo on a picket line, where the two of them watched the activity around them.

A row of shelter tents sprang up, with their open ends facing the horses. A kitchen wagon gave out the pleasant sounds and smells of a meal in preparation.

When the horses' backs were cool, their riders took them from the line and removed the saddles. How good that felt! Their skins twitched in relief.

After a roll on the sweet-smelling fresh grass, kicking heels up in the air, the bay was led to a small stream, where he drank the clear water with relish. A bullfrog croaked near-by. Top Kick listened, then put his nose back into the cool water again. He showed his approval of being with Bayley and of living in the open by the way he stepped high and arched his neck as he capered back to the other horses.

Jingo was having trouble with his next neighbor on the picket line. A large chestnut would swing his hindquarters sidewise and let fly with his hoofs to the gray's flanks. Jingo squealed and kicked back. For a time they stood quietly, eyeing each other, and then began cautiously to edge together ready for a new attack.

Top Kick was taking no part in this scrap. But suddenly, as Jingo jumped back, the bay horse saw the chestnut's vicious face with lips drawn back ready to bite. Once he had seen that same face above him in a desperate fight on a hillside at Front Royal. In a fury Top Kick whirled and slashed out with his hind feet. Flying hoofs returned his greeting. As he reared back, the halter-shank broke. Able now to move about freely,

Top Kick

he was giving Beelzebub the thrashing he deserved when Bayley came running. He did not know that the mild-tempered Top Kick had just settled an old-time grudge.

'Top Kick, I'm surprised at you,' said the man. 'Here I'm trying to figure out a way to keep you and you begin acting up!'

While many of the riders were making a careful survey of the country to plan their maneuvers, the others went to a wide lazily flowing river, a few miles away from camp, for a swimming lesson.

Top Kick was bareback, but had a snaffle with the reins knotted on his neck and a lock of his mane tied with them to prevent their slipping over his head. Bayley mounted him and urged him into the stream.

'Come on, Top Kick. Let me show you how to swim. This should be fun!' said Bayley encouragingly.

The bay horse gingerly moved out with little short steps, feeling for safe footing. He drew in his breath sharply as the stones slipped under his feet. But the willing horse continued to go forward.

Suddenly the bottom of the stream seemed to drop from under him! Down, down he went. Instinctively Top Kick began to swim. Bayley seized his mane and swam quietly by him on the downstream side, splashing water against his head to guide him.

When Top Kick found his footing again, the lieutenant pulled himself up on his back and took the reins. The horse scrambled up the bank and shook himself.

'Good boy, Top Kick!' said Bayley, patting him affectionately.

They looked back over the river. A string of horses and riders were crossing like a living bridge from bank to

High Water

bank. Only the heads of the horses and men could be seen sticking out of the water. How the horses snorted and blew air out of their nostrils as they joined Top Kick on the bank! But all were refreshed by the swim on this hot day.

Horses and officers went back and forth across the river several times that day. The last time Bayley kept his seat well back on Top Kick for the whole trip. The bay horse went into the water unhesitatingly now and seemed to enjoy it.

These were busy days, with the officers concerned with their field problems. The cross-country rides were often hard and tiresome, but the horses liked them.

One day, just as the officers were about to set out on a ride, they were ordered to the colonel's tent. Their horses were turned over to the orderlies. Each man held five or six horses patiently, but as the sun climbed high and still the officers remained at the tent, they moved under some trees.

The horses, too, were getting tired of the long wait. Beelzebub moved about uneasily, nipping Jingo, who stood beside him. At last the gray horse twisted around until he could lash out with his hind feet. Beelzebub reared high in the air, his head striking a large hornets' nest in the tree.

Immediately a cloud of fighting-mad insects poured out of their home and down upon the horses and men. They zoomed at heads and bodies and stung cruelly. Instantly the horses were pawing, frantic creatures, nearly wild with fright.

Beelzebub fared the worst. To get rid of the pests he started running. The other horses followed pell-mell.

Top Kick

As they dashed down the slope, they caught his excitement, which grew as they went faster and faster. Crazily they headed toward a clump of trees.

Top Kick, alone, saw their danger. He crowded in on the others to push them away from the trees and toward a level stretch. He saved all but Beelzebub, who hit a big tree-trunk and was severely bruised.

Suddenly stable call came piercingly to their ears from camp. Top Kick slid to a stop. The others slowed up. Whinnying enticingly, the bay horse trotted toward the sound of that bugle. One by one the other horses followed, all except Beelzebub. Several hours later, he came limping up to the picket line.

After chow the officers sat around a big campfire, singing and telling stories. The sound of their voices, the twittering of birds as they settled down on their roosts, and other night noises were pleasant to hear. Jingo and Top Kick sidled closer together. Even Beelzebub tried to be friendly. When taps sounded, the whole camp was asleep.

During the night a wind arose, lashing the trees back and forth wildly and worrying the horses so that they snorted and stamped uneasily. Dark clouds covered the stars and pelting rain began to fall.

The picket guard moved about quieting the animals, while among the tents there was considerable commotion. Dark forms crawled out of flooded beds and flattened tents. All night the animals stood humped over as the rain poured down upon them.

By morning the cloudburst was over, but it was still raining. The temper of both man and beast had not been improved by the sleepless night, but the routine of

High Water

the camp went on as usual. Maneuvers would continue as planned.

At four o'clock that afternoon, however, orders came through that the bivouac camp should be broken up and a forced night march be made at once to Riley. Rain still fell.

After an early supper, horses and men started. Slipping and sliding in the mud and on the wet stones, they pushed their way through the early darkness and drizzle of rain.

Top Kick's rider was ordered to report to the colonel. He pulled out of the column and galloped ahead.

'Lieutenant Bayley, sir,' he said.

'You know the low spot on the river road beyond the bridge, Bayley?' asked the colonel.

'Yes, sir!'

'Push ahead while we make this halt and see if the road is flooded there. We'll wait for your report at the bridge.'

'Yes, sir!' said Bayley.

It was one thing to move along in a column and quite another to hurry through the rain and darkness alone. Both Bayley and Top Kick had to be alert to see and find the way. Across level stretches it was not so bad, but the hollows were as black as pockets.

'Top Kick, I can't see a thing. It's up to you,' breathed the man.

At last they reached the gully that led to the river. The outline of the hilltop above them was visible, masses of trees were blurs of shadows, but down the slope it was pitch-dark. Cautiously and carefully they picked their way.

Top Kick

Suddenly Top Kick stopped.

'Why, it's the bridge!' said Bayley as sounds of rushing waters came to him. 'You're not afraid of the bridge,' he insisted, squeezing hard with his knees.

But Top Kick refused to budge. He snorted and took a step backward.

'Top Kick, I'm surprised at you! Come on!'

But the horse would not move. He trembled all over.

Bayley dismounted and got his flashlight out of the pommel pocket of his saddle. He pointed the light in front of the horse.

The bridge was out!

'Top Kick! Top Kick!' Bayley's voice broke as he patted the animal and looked at the wild torrents that eddied past him where the bridge had been.

'We've got to change our route,' said the officer, as he mounted and turned Top Kick to report this to the colonel.

But his eye had caught the flash of automobile headlights high up on the bluff on the other side of the river. A car was coming down the road to cross the bridge.

Bayley knew he could not signal with his flashlight. With the turn in the road, its feeble gleam would not be seen in time to prevent the car's plunge into the swollen river.

Only an instant did Bayley hesitate as he realized the situation. He seized the reins firmly and pushed hard with his knees.

'We're in for it, Top Kick!' he cried.

The horse looked frantically at the boiling water. He snorted, backed up, and pawed with a front foot.



Top Kick

'I'm scared, too, old boy. But let's go,' he said, urging the horse with reins and knees.

Still trembling, Top Kick jumped into the surging water where he had swum before.

This was a mad river, pulling at his legs, pounding against his sides, whirling him around. Branches and sticks got in his way. Suddenly the weight went from his back. He was riderless!

For an instant the horse allowed the current to sweep him downstream, as he searched the churning waters for the man. But he could see nothing. A sudden tug on his tail!

'Here I am, Top Kick,' Bayley called.

Top Kick swam as he had never done before. He kicked so violently that the great muscles almost burst, as the powerful body fought the whirling water.

When the horse felt the bottom under his feet, he found landing was difficult. Again and again he struggled. With a final desperate lunge he got his feet firmly under him and leapt to the shore.

'Hurry, Top Kick,' said Bayley, slapping him on the rump and lighting up the treacherous bank with his flashlight. The soft mud slid from under their feet and climbing was difficult. Gasping for breath, the horse wearily pulled himself up with the man still hanging to his tail.

Exhausted, they stumbled out on the road in front of the bridge. The car lights were almost upon them. With the flashlight Bayley quickly signaled. The car came to a skidding stop.

'Bridge is out!' gasped the officer, as several people jumped out of the car and surrounded the tired horse and rider.

High Water

'You swam that river to warn us?' demanded the driver incredulously.

'My horse did it!' said Bayley.

Rider and motorist stayed there to warn other cars and to point the headlights across the river so that the officers and horses on the march could see from the other side that the bridge had collapsed.

Soon the colonel called across to Bayley. He could barely be heard above the rushing sound of the water.

When he learned the situation he said: 'Fine work, Bayley. Go direct to Riley. We'll take the other way.'

Gray streaks of morning lighted up the sky; the rain had stopped as the bay horse slowly approached the post.

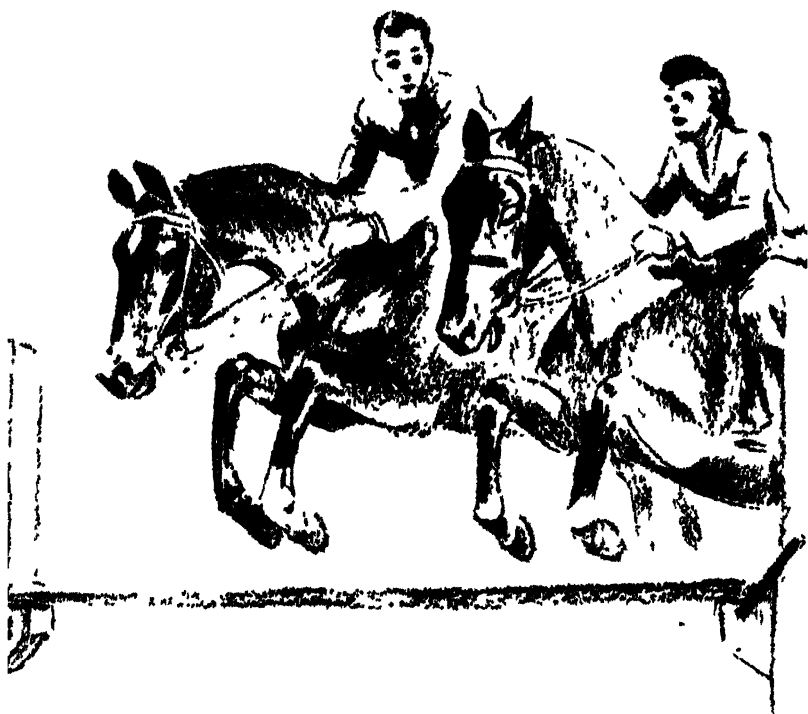
'The end of another day's work, old boy,' said Bayley wearily. 'And now I give you up to that major again. Oh, Top Kick! Top Kick!'

The bay horse perked up his ears at that tone of distress and affection.

A week later, Lieutenant Bayley was given a medal for his bravery.

'The honor should go to Top Kick,' said the young man. 'I only did what any Army officer would have done in that emergency.'

But would the heroic act keep the two, officer and mount, together?



16. THE BLIND HORSE JUMPS

WHILE Lieutenant Bayley was at camp, Muggins was working with her blind horse.

'How's Sandy Jim coming along?' he asked the girl one day after his return to the post. The two Millers and he had met at Top Kick's stall.

'He's doing better and better,' said Muggins. 'He can walk, trot, and even gallop, now, without being so afraid. Do you suppose I can teach him to jump?'

'You sure got high notions, Miss Muggins,' said Zack. 'You ain't goin' learn him jumpin', is you?'

'He was a swell jumper before he was sick,' said the girl.

The Blind Horse Jumps

'Oh, she'll do it,' said Nason proudly. 'If Muggins makes up her mind to do anything, she'll see it through. Sandy Jim'll try his durndest to please her.'

'I admire your pluck, Muggins,' said Bayley, which was high praise from him.

Now it was up to the girl to train the horse in spite of anything!

'I'm on my way to ride Sandy Jim. Come on, let me show you what he can do, Lieutenant,' she urged suddenly.

As Bayley hesitated a moment, she added, 'Let Zack saddle Top Kick for you and come on.'

'But I haven't got permission to use Top Kick. He's still assigned to Major Andrews, you know.'

'Sure, for class work,' insisted Muggins, 'but has anyone stopped you from using him other times?'

'No, but it isn't just sporting to use another man's mount, is it?'

'Poppycock! Top Kick needs to be exercised more than just in the riding hall, and Major Andrews never touches him except then. After getting that medal with Top Kick, no one will stop you from riding him. The whole post knows how much you two like each other.'

So Bayley was persuaded at last and mounted Top Kick in front of the stables. The bay whinnied as Sandy Jim sidled over toward Top Kick.

'See how he likes Top Kick!' exclaimed Muggins. 'Of course he should,' she added. 'Sandy Jim was hopeless until Top Kick took him in hand.'

That was the beginning of many hours together for the two horses and their riders. In their mutual affection for Top Kick, the young lieutenant and the major's daughter

Top Kick

ter had forgotten their animosity for each other. And now their interest in the blind horse's progress with Top Kick helping him absorbed all the time they could spend with each other and their mounts.

Sandy Jim learned to trot and gallop with a new gay spirit when Top Kick was beside him. He held his head up and even pranced on occasion. Muggins and the lieutenant were delighted with his progress.

Then gradually the girl taught the blind horse that obstacles were in his path. First she had him touch them before going over them. Slowly, being very careful not to let his confidence in her or Top Kick be shaken and watching for possible accidents, she urged him to jump. Some days it seemed as if the feat could never be accomplished; other days there was a glimmer of hope. But Muggins, advised and helped in every way by the lieutenant and Top Kick, slowly taught her horse to go over hurdles.

At first Sandy Jim struck the three-foot jump with his hind feet. To this horse, whose sense of sound had grown unusually keen, the clatter of his hoofs on the top rail must have sounded like a thunderclap. He trembled in fright and it was some time before he could be coaxed to try it again. But at last he did, with Top Kick jumping beside him. This time Muggins timed his leap a bit sooner and he carried his hind feet well over before letting them drop to the ground. After that he usually cleared the fence; he jumped clean.

But it took patience and more patience. Had one of the three, Muggins, Lieutenant Bayley, or Top Kick, faltered in their zeal to get him to jump, Sandy Jim would never have learned.

The Blind Horse Jumps

One day, as Muggins rested from their labors, she said to Bayley: 'Why don't you teach Top Kick some tricks? All you've done with him lately is to give him advanced equitation stuff — bending, stopping suddenly, and the rest.' Then she coaxed: 'See if you can make him lie down for you. I'll bet you can.'

Bayley got off Top Kick and picked up his right forefoot. With the left rein he gently pulled the brown head around until he threw the horse off his balance.

'That's the way to do it!' cried Muggins. 'Isn't Top Kick a peach? You can do anything with him.'

He hardly knew what was happening to him, so slowly was he pushed over. Before he was completely on his side, Bayley straightened his head and the horse found himself on the ground with his forefeet under him.

At first Top Kick was puzzled and uncertain, but as he found what the officer expected of him, he lowered himself to the soft green turf again and again.

This seemed so easy that a few days later Bayley got into the saddle while he was down, and the willing animal rose to his feet with the officer on his back. Top Kick began searching for the carrot in Bayley's pockets as if he knew he deserved it. When he got it, he was ready to perform again.

'Isn't he a honey?' cried the girl in delight.

'He's the quickest horse to learn I ever saw,' said Bayley.

'And Sandy's the slowest,' said Muggins. 'But he was smart when he had his eyes,' she added quickly in his defense.

Toward the end of the term the Cavalry School usually put on a horse show. It was one of the big events of

Top Kick

the year and everybody on the post and for miles around came to see it.

'Going to take part in the show?' Muggins asked Bayley.

'How can I?' asked the lieutenant. 'Major Andrews is going after the jumping cup with Top Kick, you know.'

'What a pity! He'll never get it. No horse can offset the crazy things that man does when he's in the saddle. Not even Top Kick,' said Muggins.

As she spoke, she walked Sandy Jim to the three-and-a-half-foot jump, where he touched it on his breast to know its height. Then she cantered him away from it.

'O.K.?' she asked Bayley.

'Go,' he said, turning Top Kick with Sandy Jim. Both horses settled down into a good even stride and went toward the fence.

'Come on!' she urged them. 'Ready!' she said as they approached the jump, and 'Hup!' as they leaped into the air.

Sandy Jim had cleared the bars as well as Top Kick, and both made a beautiful picture of rhythm as they performed together. Sandy Jim had been hand-ridden all the way.

'That was swell!' said Nason, who had come to the flats where the horses were training away from inquisitive eyes. 'Why don't you two put on that jumping exhibition at the horse show?'

After much discussion they finally decided to do it. Muggins saw this was a way to get Lieutenant Bayley into the show on Top Kick; Bayley thought her long patience with the blind horse should be rewarded. Then they worked even harder with Top Kick and Sandy Jim

The Blind Horse Jumps

until both jumped together perfectly over different kinds of jumps and never lost their confidence or dash.

At last the day of the horse show arrived.

On Top Kick, Zack put a white saddle blanket, a white halter-shank, and a glossy saddle with the odor of saddle soap still on it.

'There you is,' the stableman said, slapping him on the flank. 'See how your sides shine, an' your tail looks fine. You is arrayed like Solomon an' one of these. Now what you goin' do today? You goin' make me proud!'

The riding hall was packed to the doors with people, the post band played. Every horse was prancing with excitement.

'Where's Lieutenant Bayley?' asked Muggins, in white breeches and with a white carnation in the buttonhole of her dark riding-coat. Her blind horse was 'dolled up' for the occasion, too.

'He say don't worry, Miss Muggins,' answered Zack, holding the bay horse. 'He ain't goin' see Top Kick until after the major jump with him.'

But as she watched the perfectly timed cavalry drill, the thrilling soldiers' exhibition of rough riding, and a ponderous but beautifully executed performance with heavy artillery guns and horses, both the girl and Sandy Jim became uneasy. Top Kick, sharing their feelings, stamped impatiently and whinnied for his young master.

A ride through fire, an act by High School horses, and still no sign of Bayley!

At last the competition for the officers' cup in jumping was called. Just as Zack led Top Kick to the in-gate, he heard Muggins exclaim: 'Oh, I'm so glad you're here! I'm so excited I can't think!'

Top Kick

Bayley replied sternly: 'You've got to think and see for yourself and Sandy, too. Pull yourself together, old girl. Calm down while we watch the major as he proves to everybody what a good horseman he is.'

Top Kick could feel the pride in his rider as he cantered around the arena. Soon it was their turn to jump.

So anxious was the major that spurs dug cruelly into Top Kick's sides. The bay tore down upon the first hurdle at a gallop. Suddenly, almost on top of the brush jump, he swerved to the right and ran around it! Pulled up sharply for another attempt, he neatly side-stepped to the left.

Galloping toward the next bars, Top Kick skidded to a stop in front of them. He deliberately knocked the pine rails down with a forefoot!

A gasp from the audience broke the silence. A few titters from the visitors were quickly stifled.

The following two jumps were repetitions — run around and knock down! The major's face was red, he looked explosive! The spurs were drawing blood in Top Kick's sides.

Then came the last jump, taller and more forbidding than the others. Top Kick pranced toward it as if he were having a wonderful time. Suddenly he dashed at it as though he would run through it. But he slid to a stop directly in front of the big barrier. With feet apart, Top Kick rolled his head from side to side as though considering it carefully. Without warning, he gathered himself together, gave a tremendous leap and flew over the jump. So startled was the major that he tumbled off. With a snort, away danced Top Kick with two Negro soldiers running after him. Straight to Sandy Jim, Muggins, and

The Blind Horse Jumps

his young lieutenant he went as if he thought he'd done a smart trick.

Before Muggins and Bayley could get over their amazement at Top Kick's performance, it was time for them to jump.

'But don't you see I can't do it, Muggins?' Bayley insisted. 'With Major Andrews boiling with humiliation, I can't go out there on Top Kick. It wouldn't be cricket.'

'But what can I do?' asked the girl. 'I've never jumped Sandy alone and we're on the program. I've never failed to appear if my name was printed.'

'Where's your brother? He could ride Top Kick!'

Very dubiously Muggins consented. Could Nason handle this new Top Kick who so enjoyed acting up? The boy was willing to try.

The band was playing as the horses entered the riding hall. Sandy Jim responded to that military music as an Army horse should, walking proudly and importantly. Top Kick, too, who was still excited from his earlier appearance, stepped high in perfect time to the march with his neck beautifully arched. They were greeted by a roar of hand-clapping which for an instant startled both horses. But a word from their riders quieted them.

Through a loud-speaker a voice told the audience how the girl and boy had been discovered training the horses and that they would demonstrate what a blind horse and a very lively horse could do. The reference to Top Kick's former actions brought a hearty laugh. Then the crowds were suddenly silent. The band was still. Breathlessly the people watched the two horses and their young riders.

Jumps were put in place. Sandy Jim measured each slowly and quietly.

Top Kick

'O.K.?' asked Muggins at the end of the hall.

'Go,' said Nason.

Both horses matched gaits and cantered shoulder to shoulder toward the series of hurdles. The long hours of patient training told, the two had settled down to the task before them.

At each jump, Muggins's 'Come on!' 'Ready!' and 'Hup!' could be heard all over the hall. Sweetly and easily they rose over the white bars, never breaking their stride and their rhythm. It was a beautiful performance.

A great 'Ah' burst forth from the audience as they finished. A frenzy of applause broke over their heads as they left the hall.

The 'Miller kids,' with their blind Sandy Jim and the unmanageable Top Kick, had completely stolen the horse show!



17. THE WAR MACHINE OR THE HORSE

'Ain't this the beatenest hoss?' Zack asked the crowd of colored soldiers who stood around watching him groom Top Kick the morning after the horse show. 'He say "no" to every jump and then come the biggest and he say "yes." He don't like that major, so he make everybody laugh at him.'

'Yah, the crowd sure laughed. An' did you see 'im coax the blind hoss to jump? Bet that major burned hisself up!'

'A colonel say that Top Kick do the two most 'telligent acts of the show!' offered one soldier.

'He sure did. Ain't soldier hosses smart?' said another. The men all nodded, grinning broadly.

'But Major Andrews say Top Kick's finish is a-comin'. What he mean?' asked another in an anxious tone.

'Don't you know the Mechanized's comin' — all the way from Texas?'

Top Kick

The black faces were serious now.

'Mechanized, what's that?'

'Trucks an' cars and tanks an' such — hundreds of 'em, an' no hosses!'

'How that finish Top Kick?' asked Zack.

'The major's goin' join the Mechanized,' put in one soldier.

'You bet he goin' to!' The others grinned again. 'He never ride a hoss again!'

'Mechanized,' repeated Zack, rolling the unfamiliar word on his tongue. 'How that hurt Top Kick?' he insisted.

'They ain't goin' be no hosses in the Army; just tanks an' fightin' machines,' said the first Negro solemnly. 'Top Kick ain't goin' be a soldier hoss no more — that what the major say.'

'Can't be no cavalry with no hosses!' said another. 'You're plumb crazy!'

For a moment the men hung their heads sadly. Then they broke into a frenzy of talk. Losing their horses was the greatest disaster that had ever threatened them. Top Kick moved restlessly as the currycomb stopped in its course over his sides.

'Top Kick not groomed?' Lieutenant Bayley asked as he came into the stable.

'Just a minute, sah.' A couple of soldiers grabbed currycombs and brushes to help Zack finish the job.

'They ain't goin' take Top Kick away, is they, sah?' asked Zack.

'What's the cavalry without hosses, sah?' said another, patting Jingo.

The puzzled lieutenant looked around the doleful group.

The War Machine or the Horse

'The Mechanized,' said another, stumbling over the unusual word, 'ain't goin' take our hosses, is they?'

A light broke over Bayley's face.

'That argument about horses and motor vehicles for the cavalry has been going on for years,' he said. 'No, we won't lose our horses just yet. But you just watch the show this armored force is going to put on and see if you think their stuff can beat our horses!'

Top Kick snorted as the brisk fall breeze struck him at the doorway. Bayley patted him and mounted.

At Sandy Jim's stable, Muggins was talking affectionately to her blind horse. His ears perked up straight and his neck arched as he nosed her pockets.

Top Kick sidled up to his blind friend.

'Top Kick and I think Sandy's pretty swell,' Bayley said. 'The whole post is buzzing with his praise this morning,' he added, 'and for years to come you'll be the shining example in equitation classes of what can be done with patience and kind treatment of a horse. Everybody lauds you, Muggins.'

'Everybody?' asked Muggins slyly, looking at the young officer from under long lashes.

'Yes, everybody, including myself!' he cried, with feeling. 'You're the best sport I ever knew, you're lovely to look at, you're the gayest, sweetest ——' Words failed him.

'Tut, tut! I'm just the girl who rode Top Kick against your orders,' she said, laughing and shaking her finger at him. She patted Top Kick's nose and put an arm around his neck, looking up at the man with twinkling soft eyes.

'Muggins, you know what I think of you, you can't

Top Kick

help but know,' Bayley said, reaching for her hand on the brown neck. 'I want ——'

'Top Kick was the real star yesterday,' Muggins interrupted quickly, drawing her hand away. The bay stepped toward her.

'See Top Kick help me! I'm talking about you and me,' insisted Bayley, 'not yesterday's show.'

But the spell was broken as the girl cleverly shied away from the import of his words. She hopped into Sandy Jim's saddle.

'Wasn't Top Kick clever in getting rid of the major?' she asked as they moved out. 'And now Top Kick is yours, all yours! What more do you want?' she added as she urged Sandy Jim forward.

The wind blew fresh in the faces of horses and riders as they raced over the hills. They pulled up on a knoll with a wide view of the countryside. Puffing from their ride, they looked out across the rolling prairie.

'There they come now!' exclaimed Bayley. 'The mechanized force!' He looked at his watch. 'Ahead of time, too. In usual Army style they beat their own time!'

On a long road which stretched as far as they could see was a moving column like a long string of tiny ants. Closer and closer it crept, as they watched. For miles and miles the stream covered that ribbon of pavement.

'Must be twenty or twenty-five miles long!' cried Bayley. But his voice had no lift to it.

'Jealous of all that motor and metal?' asked Muggins.

'Could be,' he admitted.

'But it has no brains and no heart!' she exclaimed.

'I know,' he answered. 'Let's go down toward the road and take a look at them.'

The War Machine or the Horse

The horses stepped about uneasily as the string of armored cars rumbled toward them. Small vehicles, big ones! Some with wheels, others with tracks (or the caterpillar means of locomotion), and still others with wheels in front and tracks behind. Motorcycles and three-wheelers to six and even eight-wheeled giants! Wheeling and tracking, on came the vehicles of war, bristling with machine guns.

Scout cars on four wheels thoroughly armored but open above passed by — hundreds of them.

‘They can fire in any direction from that rail on top,’ Bayley told Muggins. ‘And you see they have a four-wheeled drive.’

Half-track vehicles without weapons, wheels in front and tracks behind, carried troops. Tanks, tractors, and reconnaissance cars fully armored and turreted rolled by!

‘Look at those tanks,’ said the young lieutenant. ‘On wheels now for the trip, but they use tractor treads on the field.’

‘Here come the slow-pokes!’ exclaimed Muggins. ‘They’re enough to scare anybody.’

‘The combat cars!’ said Bayley, as the light tanks tracked toward them.

Trucks to move howitzers, the big guns! Mortar-carriers to blind the enemy with smoke! Artillery tanks! Traveling machine shops and vehicles for repairs and spare parts! Even cargo trucks and rolling kitchens moved in a continuous stream into Fort Riley.

For a whole hour Bayley and Muggins watched the Mechanized Force pass by.

‘How about it?’ she asked the lieutenant. ‘Convinced they will take the place of horses?’

Top Kick

'Not yet,' he said gruffly. 'We'll see what they can do tomorrow.'

'Well, until then we won't worry over losing Top Kick,' said Muggins consolingly.

But they were very serious as they rode back to the post. After Muggins and Sandy Jim left him, the lieutenant rode on to view the outfit as it poured out on the parade ground.

Top Kick sniffed dubiously at these great brown masses of iron, road smells mixed with the offensive odors of gasoline and oil. He stepped about uneasily as Bayley urged him close to them.

As a lieutenant scrambled out of a scout car, he said: 'Seven hundred and fifty miles in five days! Guess that beats anything your horse can do.'

Bayley didn't attempt to defend Top Kick. 'How many vehicles?' he asked crisply.

'Six hundred armored cars with over two thousand officers and men,' answered the other.

'Have a good trip?' asked Bayley politely.

'Elegant! We camped in parks and fairgrounds where the townspeople poured around us to see our vehicles. They were as enthusiastic and as interested as if we'd been the circus coming to town. They entertained us royally, dinner and a dance nearly every night! How the American soldier likes to dance!'

'It must have been almost a triumphal march,' suggested Bayley.

'Wait till you see our demonstration and you'll think we have triumphed,' said the other boastfully. 'You'll know your horse is antiquated, out-of-date, and so outmoded that he'll be kicked out of the Army soon.'

The War Machine or the Horse

Bayley shrugged his shoulders — he would not be drawn into an argument — and moved on to look at the vehicles more carefully.

The next day the Mechanized Force demonstrated what the vehicles could do. They performed together in formation and singly to show the special abilities of each particular war machine.

They ran over rough ground, tore through great barriers of sand, nosed up over impossible banks to worm down on the other side in an incredibly short time. They smashed great piles of brush and logs and rolled over them without effort. On they went, twisting, turning both slowly and at amazing speeds. There was nothing awkward about these great cumbersome machines as they performed their inconceivable tasks.

Bayley whistled under his breath again and again.

At last he said: 'Top Kick, old boy, there's the new war horse. No animal could suffer the punishment they are taking. I'm afraid that's the end of the Army for you!'

The ability to keep fighting and rolling regardless of obstacles had been clearly shown by the Mechanized Force, but the men were still loyal to their horses. Top Kick could sense their worry and distress as they hung around him, grooming him as he had never been groomed before.

'If tanks an' such is so good, why-for don't Ringling's Circus have 'em?' inquired one Negro. 'They uses hosses to get to their grounds an' off ag'in 'count of mud or rainy weather.'

'How those soldiers goin' drive those things an' watch for signals?' another asked. 'Hosses got sense. They

Top Kick

ain't goin' smack into trees an' ditches like cars and tractors is.'

'It make too much noise,' said a third. 'Everybody knows they's comin'.'

'They can't turn so quick as a hoss,' added another.

So the discussion went on and on. The men spent a long time with the horses that day, talking to the animals and caring for them and showing their devotion to them and their distress and fear of separation.

But the next day the mechanized cavalry and horse cavalry staged a maneuver together. Top Kick with Lieutenant Bayley on his back took part.

A horse-cavalry regiment was supposed to be attacking an enemy, which it had located the night before. Then a squadron of combat cars joined the horses and men for the final attack with a battery of field artillery helping.

It was an exciting and fearful business for Top Kick with the noisy vehicles and their ear-splitting guns so close to him. He knew Bayley was uneasy too by the way he sat in his saddle.

On open ground, traveling across country, the cars sometimes attained the speed of twenty-five miles per hour. They crashed headlong through the woods and brush of Magazine Canyon at ten miles an hour and found nothing to stop them. Up and down ditches and banks they climbed without any difficulty. Trees that were too large to go over, they swerved around. Nothing stopped them.

At times the machines ran away from the horses, so Lieutenant Bayley could only watch them from a distance. Again the mounted cavalry met the vehicles when the officers could see them work near-by. They were able

The War Machine or the Horse

to go over any kind of ground and over or around every obstacle on the Fort Riley Reservation.

The officer patted Top Kick and talked in affectionate undertones to him. Neither of them could like these monsters which threatened to put the horses of the cavalry out, even though Bayley admitted their efficiency.

Toward the end of the day with only one more mission left to do through a low valley by the river, Bayley suddenly found himself going through fog — heavy fog that was rising up from the stream in thick clouds. As he zig-zagged through the thick trees, Top Kick and he could see only a foot or two in front of them. But they had once gone through complete darkness to cross the flooded river, and this was not so bad as that. It only slowed their speed a bit as they wound in and out between the thick trees. At last Top Kick pushed on to the finish, where several hundred students, post personnel, and civilian guests were gathered to watch the maneuvers. A great cry went up! The mechanized vehicles had been stopped in their tracks by the fog and thick trees, but a horse and rider had come through!

A fellow cavalryman slapped Bayley on the back. 'You showed them, boy, you showed up that mechanized outfit,' he said. 'You got through in record time, and here come the others' — as the rest of the mounted cavalry came galloping up the hill.

While the crowd waited for the sight of the long-delayed vehicles, many were laughing, pounding each other on the back, and shouting with joy because that day's maneuvers had proved horses can perform missions which the mechanized forces are unable to do.

'In thick trees with a fog like that, both vehicles and

Top Kick

airplanes would be unable to reconnoiter. In certain places the horse remains the "seeing eye" of the Army,' a general said.

Muggins joined the hero of the day, gave his arm a little squeeze to show her joy, and fondled Top Kick lovingly. Bayley was so surprised at this turn of events that he was speechless. But his delight over the 'demonstration' of his horse shone in his eyes.

That night Zack cried: 'He done it! Top Kick done it! He saved hisself and all the other hosses! Ain't he smart?'



18. THE TESTING GROUND

SOME time after the Mechanized Force came to Fort Riley, the short course for cavalymen was finished. Now the graduates would command troops through big maneuvers which might prove them good officers and lead to particularly desirable new stations. Lieutenant Bayley knew only too well that his military career depended largely on what he did in these sham battles, and more than that, his success might show a certain flippant young Muggins that he was a real Army officer.

So one day Top Kick found himself in a portee trailer with Jingo, six other horses, and their equipment. The gray horse had acted up as usual when he was loaded, but the others had entered the horse truck willingly. Now the portee was rolling south toward Louisiana, Arkansas, and East Texas, which had been chosen as the 'battle-ground.'

Top Kick

Most of the animals rode well, were calm and reasonably contented. But the contrary Jingo seemed to enjoy falling down, teasing the others until they squealed, or kicking until he stopped the entire procession of vehicles.

Finally the cavalry from Riley reported to the 'Blue' general. Throwing up pyramid tents, they waited for orders to fight the 'Red' Army in this 'war' which would have all the elements of the real thing except that the ammunition was harmless. Bayley rode Top Kick about camp. He was zealous for a good road between the rows of tents and for well-drained picket lines.

At the same time, the young lieutenant must attend to the camouflage of the big portee trailers, which were conspicuous on the landscape. For if the airplanes spotted them and claimed them by 'bombing,' his troop would lose the use of them. Top Kick nosed his master as the officer talked to his men who would do the job.

'Remember to consider form, shadow, texture, and color carefully,' said Bayley. He had learned the principles of camouflage in the Cavalry School.

One man decided he could conceal his portee completely under the hanging Spanish moss of a big tree. Another stood branches up around his vehicle to break its straight lines. Others brought burlap to cover the windshields and headlights and stretched a net over the truck to change its shadows and hide it from the air.

Bayley explained, 'Whenever you move these portee trailers, you must stay in the woods or under cover and camouflage them again at every stop.'

Soon the 'war' began in earnest. The cavalry troop on an hour's notice set out on an all-night march without a single vehicle. No light was allowed in that totally

The Testing Ground

black night and the men could not sing, talk, or even whisper to each other. Through the pitch-darkness of the woods, over unfamiliar logging roads and tree-covered trails, Top Kick led Bayley's platoon. Only the snapping of twigs, the creaking of saddles and packs, and the hoofbeats told that the long column was working up toward the 'enemy.'

Top Kick snorted a bit in this weird silence, but Bayley calmed him quickly by patting him until he stepped along quietly. The lieutenant grew nervous and uncertain, fearing he had lost his bearings. He pulled to one side and furtively peeked at his map with carefully shielded flashlight.

'Dash that light!' came the stern but guarded voice of the captain. 'Bayley, "no lights" means no lights! You should have memorized this area!'

'Yes, sir!' said the lieutenant in a muffled voice.

He slumped in the saddle. In his great desire to be certain of his route, he had won a reprimand! A poor beginning for a man whose Army career hung in the balance!

At dawn scouts brought back the location of the 'enemy.' Across swamps and bayous or creeks, the men pushed their horses to attack on the flank. The 'Reds' retreated with the cavalry pounding along after them. In the afternoon the horsemen caught up with them and Bedlam broke loose. Clack-clack-clackity-clack and bang-bang-bang! So thoroughly had the horses been trained to fire that Top Kick endured the racket as he tore through it.

But it was a relief to him when a colonel ran up a white flag and the 'battle' ceased. This officer was the

Top Kick

umpire who checked the amount of firing and the strategic positions gained by each side. The cavalry got the decision with a good many prisoners of infantry. The victors gave a loud cheer as the captured doughboys left with marks against them — penalized by a full day out of the war game.

Lieutenant Bayley's troop made a bivouac camp of 'pup' tents. Each soldier had a shelter-half in his pack, which he combined with another man's to make a small tent for the two of them. The food for both man and beast came from the packs and saddle-bags. On his picket line, Top Kick and the other horses were relieved of the heavy burden they had carried throughout that long march and the battle. Full field equipment adds to the burden of such a day as this. Now it was pleasant to rest in a peaceful place where frogs croaked and insects made squeaking sounds!

In the days that followed, horsemen on patrol slipped quietly through the trees, cars scouted along a side road. Airplanes droned overhead, engineers built bridges and roads, and troops of the enemy were apt to pop up anywhere.

The young lieutenant pored carefully over maps and notes before discussing the field problems with the officers of his outfit. Gradually Bayley's confidence grew as the captain called on him for his comments on matters concerning the troop. For a war game requires teamwork.

One morning at daylight, Bayley had charge of the troop which was engaged in 'mopping-up' activities. Back and forth the men rode to rid the area of every last 'Red.'

The Testing Ground

'Maybe this is my chance, Top Kick,' whispered the officer to his horse.

Suddenly Bayley pulled his mount to a stop. Before his surprised eyes were khaki tents, khaki shirts and pants on a line, and men running around in their underwear.

'What a break for me — a bunch of prisoners!' muttered the lieutenant as he signaled to his troop and rode down upon the camp.

'Get those clothes on quick,' Bayley ordered the surprised men, as the horses, carrying soldiers with drawn guns, completely surrounded them. 'You're our prisoners. Break up that camp and come along!'

'O.K., soldier!' said one of the men impudently, as he pulled on a gay red plaid coat.

Bayley's mouth flew open. In his eagerness he had captured, not the enemy, but an innocent hunting party!

As the lieutenant was stuttering his apologies and his men were snickering or laughing outright, up rode the umpire and the captain! The situation didn't seem funny to the captain, as his troop got a demerit for the mistake. He said little, but his lieutenant knew it would take a lot of doing to offset the blunder. Poor Bayley was so limp in the saddle that Top Kick nickered softly under his breath in sympathy.

On some days the cavalry regiment marched through a choking dust which rose in clouds, sticking unpleasantly to the sweating men and horses. At other times they crossed swampland where the going was so heavy that Bayley dismounted and led Top Kick through it.

But the hardest of all was when a new order arrived before the previous one was carried out — so that there was constant movement in areas where the portee trailers

Top Kick

could not be used. Often there was but one meal a day for both men and animals and little chance for rest! Bayley and Top Kick tried to hold their heads up as an example to the others, who were so weary and exhausted they plodded, with the men almost falling out of their saddles and the horses hardly able to take another step.

As they slushed through a town one afternoon, Bayley suddenly spied a hammock in a store window. He pulled Top Kick to a stop. There was just time to buy it. Others of his troop purchased the merchant's full stock of hammocks.

'Another crazy idea!' sputtered the captain, as Bayley strung up his hammock between trees and got out his shelter-half to go over it. The lieutenant reddened but said nothing.

But the next morning the captain's tent was standing in eight inches of water. He was soaked to the skin, and mad as a hornet when he saw how comfortable and dry the men in hammocks had been. He had to admit Bayley had used his head, but he didn't feel more kindly toward him.

For days troops plowed through the mud—sticky slimy mud! They couldn't find the enemy, they couldn't find their landmarks. They were dirty, wet, and uncomfortable most of the time both day and night, with mosquitoes to make things worse. A thoroughly unsatisfactory business, this playing at war. But through it all, Bayley kept up the morale of his men, guarded their health and the condition of the horses. Never did he lose his patience, and gradually the troopers were beginning to know and respect him.

One day a Chemical Warfare motor-cycle tore by

The Testing Ground

with its rider blowing a siren, the signal for a gas attack.

A supply truck had delivered equipment to use against gas to the cavalry outfit, so they were well prepared. The men ran for masks for themselves and their animals.

Top Kick allowed Bayley to put the long stocking-like mask over his nose without any fuss, but Jingo reared on his hind legs, striking at the mask with his front feet like playing a jew's-harp. Bayley had to assist his rider before the horse could be quieted. The men got into their masks as quickly as they could and stood at their horses' heads to show they were ready. Their speed in getting the masks on and moving out to the battle-field, as well as their combat action while wearing the masks, was the basis on which the umpire graded their work. Lieutenant Bayley's unit made a very creditable showing and the captain complimented the young officer.

'Thank you, sir,' said Bayley.

As the weather cleared, airplanes zoomed continually through the sky. At Riley the cavalry horses had become accustomed to planes above them, so showed no fear now, but Top Kick never lost his uneasiness when they swooped down toward him. In one battle a plane streaked by with a plume of smoke behind it. This smoke settled down so the cavalry troops could retreat through it out of sight of the enemy. Top Kick led Bayley's platoon through that cloud of smoke without hesitation. To him it was just like heavy fog! That day Top Kick and Bayley both were commended by the captain!

'Thanks, old boy,' said Bayley to his horse later. 'I need your help these days. Muggins may be proud of us yet.'

But when the cavalry defended an area against para-

Top Kick

chute troops, Top Kick really had fun! The planes were skimming through the sky high above him when little puffs of white flew out from them. As they sailed down toward the ground, he could see that each was a parachute with a dangling man. As they landed, Top Kick dashed from one to another in an exciting game of tag. Each jumper Bayley touched became his prisoner. First to this one he raced, then to that one! Bayley's troop made the highest score and the cavalry 'captured' all the parachutists. Top Kick was the hero of the day, adding more credit to his rider.

After this amusing sport, the cavalry was plunged into hard fighting again, with guns popping and roaring around them. More night marches with surprise attacks at dawn! Dashing here and pushing through there over all kinds of country to search out the enemy!

Then one day a mechanized outfit was attached to the horse cavalry and ordered to cross the Sabine River. This would have been easy except for the heavy vehicles. Engineers with their pontoons could not reach them until the next noon, and if they built a bridge by daylight airplanes would 'bomb' them and delay them still further. The situation looked pretty hopeless!

When Bayley heard of the difficulty, he very timidly suggested, 'Why can't we improvise a ferry?'

But the captain was not impressed. Somehow Bayley's idea reached the ears of the aggressive colonel, who sent for the young lieutenant.

When Bayley returned, the captain said: 'You'd better not be wrong this time, Bayley. Not one vehicle, horse, or man can be lost. Your scheme is not only cock-eyed but dangerous.'

The Testing Ground

The young officer mounted Top Kick and rode upstream to the place where he had seen an old scow on the opposite bank. There it was, left by last week's floods.

'Top Kick, we've got to get it,' said Bayley, urging his horse into the river.

They swam across the swift current and looked at the big awkward scow half-buried in mud and sticks. Bayley pulled and jerked it until it was free.

'Not bad,' he said. 'It seems sound.'

Tying a rope to it, Bayley and Top Kick floated it downstream. By the time they got it to camp, it was dark.

What a night that was! Not even a moon to help! Under Bayley's direction cables from the truck winches or hoists were attached to the scow, and soon the 'ferry' was shuttled across the river.

When the first scout car was put on the scow and the winch began turning, Bayley was breathless. Would the cable hold? Would the scow fall apart? Was the winch strong enough to do the job? But slowly the car crept across the swirling waters. At last it reached the shore safely.

Bayley's scheme had worked. Before the sun came up, the entire outfit was on the other side.

Since the Sabine River should have stopped them, the 'Blues' found a clear field before them. The armored force followed a road along the river and the sound of gunfire showed they had met opposition. Meanwhile the horse cavalry went through a swampy area to hit the enemy in the rear to capture the 'Reds' entire stock of gasoline. That was a master stroke! It forced the 'enemy' to withdraw for fuel for their vehicles and proved the turning-point of the mimic war.

Top Kick

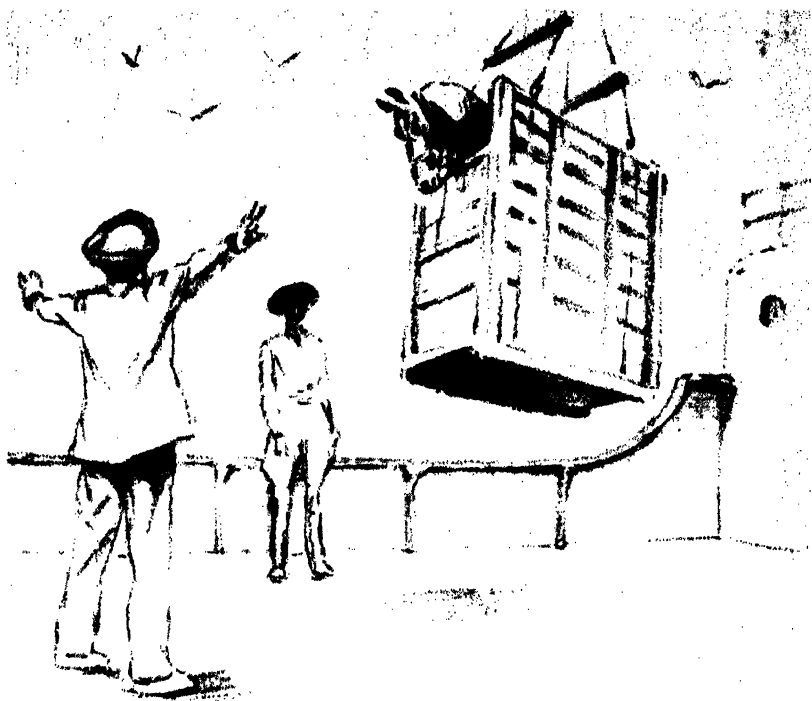
'Nice going, Bayley,' said the captain. 'Your cleverness in crossing the river made this coup possible!'

'Thank you, sir,' said Bayley modestly, with his arm on Top Kick's neck.

'Yes, you've got a fine horse there, too,' said the captain. 'You make such a perfect pair that I'll recommend you and he be kept together if possible.'

'Oh, thank you, sir,' answered Bayley. 'That's more than I dared hope for.'

Another scouting trip, another shock action, and the month's maneuvers were over! Then big portee trailers were loaded and started rolling back to Fort Riley, where the cavalry outfit would get a fifteen-day leave for work well done. The farther the trucks went the more interested did the horses become. Top Kick's ears perked up straight and he trembled with excitement as he watched the road before him. He knew he was going home!



19. OFF TO THE PHILIPPINES

BACK at the post, Lieutenant Bayley found orders for foreign service awaiting him. At the end of his leave, during which he would visit his people in the East, he must start for his new station, Fort Stotsenburg in the Philippine Islands. And he was told to take two horses with him. After considerable deliberation, he chose Jingo to go with Top Kick. The gray had stamina and could endure hardships.

One day he supervised the loading of the two animals, who had traveled on trains together before. Muggins

Top Kick

came running and stopped Zack as he led Top Kick into the car.

'Oh, Top Kick, Top Kick!' she said, with a sob in her throat as she stroked his nose.

The bay put his head against her chest and closed his eyes — the deepest sign of affection a horse can show. He must have known he was saying 'Good-bye' to her.

'Don't you worry, Miss Muggins,' said Zack, leading him into the car. 'The lieutenant goin' take good care of Top Kick.'

'Top Kick's going to take good care of the lieutenant, too,' she answered, smiling as bravely as she could with wet eyes.

'And the two of you, with Jingo to help, will knock the Japs right off the map,' she added flippantly to Bayley.

'Muggins, why do you say that? We aren't at war with Japan.'

'No, but everybody knows the Japs may break loose any time now. So you may land right in the middle of the scrap.'

Bayley shrugged his shoulders.

'My father says you're getting a fine detail,' she said enthusiastically. 'To be sent to the spot where trouble is apt to pop is a big compliment and I congratulate you.'

Bayley was suddenly inarticulate. He had come through Cavalry School and maneuvers so well that Muggins could show she was pleased with him! Now was the time to express his feeling toward her before he went so far away.

'Muggins,' he said, with emotion, 'you and I ——'

Jingo suddenly reared and began to fight, almost breaking loose. How he hated to board a train! Bayley

Off to the Philippines

jumped forward to help quiet him and his opportunity was lost.

When the officer had checked on the two horses' comfort and had joined Muggins, the engine had started. Through the open door Top Kick saw the girl's slight figure beside the tall young officer as she tried to get a last glimpse of the horses with the pain of parting in her eyes. Army girls learn very early to hide their feelings when saying good-bye.

At the wharf in San Francisco, Bayley met the two horses after their tiresome and uneventful trip. Top Kick sniffed the salty air and looked nervously at the huge structure that swayed gently in the water. He sensed that this was something new and strange to him. He had never seen a seagoing vessel before.

Jingo was led to the flying-stall, but he would not enter it. Soldiers pulled and coaxed and pushed him, but he wouldn't budge. The lieutenant and other officers joined in the efforts to get the gray into the big box. Interested troops were watching from the rail of the ship.

At last Lieutenant Bayley came to Top Kick, petted him encouragingly, and led him into the small enclosure.

'Come, Top Kick,' he said. 'Nothing to be afraid of!'

Assured by the officer's calm manner, the willing bay followed him into the stall.

'Now try Jingo,' said Bayley. 'With Top Kick inside he should make it.'

And Jingo walked in as the bay whinnied to him. When the door was closed, it was quite dark. Bayley patted the animals and talked to them quietly.

Suddenly Top Kick felt the floor sway — quite a different motion from any he had experienced before. He

Top Kick

could sense that the enclosure in which he stood was moving.

Puzzled and nervous, the horses stood motionless as the flying-stall swung through the air. Then, with a bump, it landed on the deck of the big ship. The door opened and the horses were led to their quarters, which were stalls on the well deck, covered by a canvas.

'All that fuss over nothing, Jingo. When will you ever learn to behave?' said Bayley. 'Isn't this a fine place, Top Kick?'

An hour or so later the ship began to vibrate. Top Kick could see the wharf moving steadily away from him and the strip of gray water growing wider. He nickered uneasily under his breath.

The ship rolled considerably as it steamed out of the bay. Bayley had attached straps to support each animal against this rocking. Jingo swung in his cradle-like contraption, his feet sometimes off the deck, and was very comfortable. Top Kick was higher-strung and more sensitive, and remained so tense that his straps and webs only irritated him and made him feel trapped and unhappy.

The next day brought the transport to that part of the Pacific which is always rough. Back and forth the ship rolled and then pitched forward and aft, which was much worse. Jingo serenely rocked and rocked in his supporting harness. But Top Kick was in an awful state. With eyes big and frightened and hair standing on end, the poor animal suffered miserably with the heavy sea. Bayley pacified him as much as he could, but no coaxing made him relax and be pleasantly supported. If the ship had not found smoother going soon, Top Kick might

Off to the Philippines

have become a very sick animal. For seasickness is sometimes fatal to horses.

As the water grew calmer, the soldiers on board often came to see Top Kick and Jingo with sugar and apples to offer them. They would pet and talk to the horses for hours. One young chap from a farm in Minnesota would hardly leave them to sleep and to eat his meals.

On the fifth day, Top Kick pawed and fidgeted in his stall. He looked off to sea and even whinnied. Although all he could see was water, he was so excited he scarcely noticed the farm lad in uniform.

Not until Bayley appeared and said, 'Top Kick, what's the matter?' did the horse turn his eyes to the men.

'Do you suppose he smells land, sir?' asked the soldier.

'Perhaps he does. You know horses on a desert can smell fresh water several miles away.'

'Lieutenant, how far are we from land?'

'About twenty miles,' answered Bayley.

'Yumping Yiminy!' exclaimed the soldier. 'That land must have an awful big smell for him to get it twenty miles away!'

'Horses have a keen sense of smell,' said Bayley.

'Yes, sir, I know that. But the wind is the other way. Now, ain't that something?' marveled the soldier, scratching his head.

That day the Army transport docked at Honolulu, where the horses were led ashore into a pleasant corral. How good it was to get solid earth under their feet again and to move around freely! Soft breezes fanned them and palm trees shaded them. Hawaii was a pleasant place.

But two days later, the two horses were put aboard the

Top Kick

ship again. Day after day and week after week went by. Jingo was contented, but Top Kick was not, in spite of the attention they received from the troops.

Bayley and the soldier from Minnesota would take Top Kick out of his stall and around and around the deck. At last the horse found a sheltered spot where he seemed to be more contented and would lie down. There the farm boy spent his nights, sleeping beside him.

A full month later, the ship finally docked at Manila. When Top Kick stepped out of the swinging stall, he wobbled uncertainly and could scarcely keep his feet under him.

'Poor Top Kick!' said Bayley. 'After being on a ship so long, even the solid ground is rocking, isn't it?'

But Jingo was as confident of his footing as if he hadn't come halfway around the world. He pranced and capered as the two horses were led to the quarantine corral in the port area.

Lieutenant Bayley followed his charges to the enclosure as soon as he could. Top Kick was gaunt and poor, for he had lost a hundred pounds at sea. His hair was rough and his eyes were glassy and dejected. The officer was worried.

'Top Kick, I should never have put you through this agony,' he blamed himself. 'But look at Jingo,' he added.

The gray's sides were sleek, the hair smooth and shining, and he had gained nearly as much as Top Kick had lost.

The tropical sun beat down upon them so that they hunted the shade of a spreading banyan tree. There they stayed until dusk.

'Geck-o! Geck-o!' A shrill, wild sound from the mid-

Off to the Philippines

dle of the tree made Jingo rear in fright. But poor Top Kick was too miserable to care what the big lizard said or did.

For two months the two horses remained in that corral. The veterinary officer and his assistants were wise in the ways of Army mounts who made long trips by transport, and they gave them careful attention. As the days passed, Top Kick began to look and act like himself again!

At last Lieutenant Bayley came to take Top Kick and Jingo to Fort Stotsenburg. On a horse truck they rolled over the forty miles of paved road lined with coconut palms, mango trees, rice paddies, and nipa or grass huts.

Fort Stotsenburg nestles on the side of a mountain range, with Pinatubo towering above it. This cavalry post lies lazily in the sun, its buildings shaded by big trees facing the parade ground, Clark Field with its planes beside it and comfortable airy stables. Top Kick and Jingo found it a delightful place.

Again Bayley gave his favorite mount the longeing lessons to get him into condition. At the same time Jingo went around and around a Filipino soldier in his usual way, first sweet as a lamb and then hopelessly contrary.

When Jingo stopped to paw the air, the boy's eyes were open wide with fear. Panic-stricken, he looked to the officer for help.

'Jingo is all right, Tamaso!' said Bayley. 'He's just trying you out. Show him you are boss!'

Gradually, the Filipino got the gray under control. At last he said, taking a big breath: 'I have great nervousity with this creature. My anxiety is terrible!'

Bayley smiled at the willing lad and his quaint English with its stiff words, which was typical of the islands.

Top Kick

'Nervosity?' questioned Bayley. 'I guess you mean jitters! You've got to get over that or you can't handle horses for me.'

'Yes, sir,' said Tamaso meekly.

Soon the lieutenant and Tamaso were riding Top Kick and Jingo over the rough country around the post. The gray horse seemed to like this boy, who perched on him like a monkey, and behaved especially well as the two horses climbed over narrow mountain passes and down difficult slopes.

Suddenly one day they came upon a group of black, naked woolly-haired dwarfs who scurried like rabbits when they saw the horses.

'Probably the most uncivilized race in the world, the Negritos,' muttered Bayley to himself as Top Kick stopped stock-still in surprise.

A last man, wearing nothing but a mere wisp of a dirty loincloth or g-string, caught his huge bow, which was much taller than he, in a bush and so was delayed in his flight. So frightened was he that he dropped an arrow as he skinned up over a perpendicular wall or cliff like a wild animal.

Tamaso sprang off Jingo and brought the long slender shaft to his officer. Bayley looked at it carefully while the boy explained that these tiny people couldn't hunt or fight without bows and arrows. They used deer arrows, pig arrows, fish arrows, but this vicious-looking missile was a man arrow.

Bayley shivered as he thought of that sharp-headed, feathered bamboo whizzing at him through the air. But Tamaso assured him that the troops at Fort Stotsenburg had made friends with a few of these little wild men, giv-

Off to the Philippines

ing them matches and trinkets, so that they were safe neighbors.

Life was easy in the islands. The monotonous school days were left behind, and the mounted drills and gun-practice periods were short, since man and horse must be less strenuous in the tropics. The lieutenant was busy with his troop of Filipino soldiers, which included Tamaso, but he would not push his horses.

But soon Top Kick and Jingo could feel a tenseness among the men and a restlessness among the other horses. Preparations began for maneuvers on the peninsula of Bataan. Soon the horses were in a portee trailer and rolling south.

Back at the Manila docks again, Top Kick trembled from head to foot. He had hated his voyage across the Pacific so much that even the smell of the salty water made him fearful. But this time Tamaso led the horses into barges, where they were tied in two rows in the bottom. Top Kick stood with his front feet far apart and rolled his head from side to side in distress.

The sun was setting over Mariveles with gay streamers of color playing against the cloud that always hangs over that great mountain. Through the water, that was rosy with reflected light, went three barges loaded with horses and equipment and pulled by a tug, puffing along in front of them.

On through Manila Bay went the barge, the last one of the string. A breeze blew pleasantly on Top Kick's back. The moment the great glowing ball dropped out of sight, darkness settled over the water, for there is no twilight in the Philippines. Stars twinkled, a whole shower of them, and some of the horses were lulled to

Top Kick

sleep by the gentle rocking of the barge. Top Kick relaxed and forgot to keep vigil.

Suddenly there was a jerk. A shape loomed up in front of Top Kick's startled eyes, voices rang out and the barge lost headway. Tamaso and the other soldier yelled excitedly to the tug and other barges. They called louder and louder until they were shrieking. But nobody answered. A Japanese fishing boat had cut between the two barges and had broken the towrope. Its putt-putt did not stop until it was lost in the distance.

Jingo now was as frightened as Top Kick. He had become alarmed when he got a whiff of fish as the boat passed them. Now his terror grew as Tamaso screamed.

All night that barge floated aimlessly about Manila Bay. Dark hulks appeared and the soldiers would call and call to them. A huge liner ablaze with lights steamed into the harbor, but did not see the flat barge. The horses grew calm as nothing serious happened to them, all except Top Kick, who trembled and looked at the water with frightened eyes.

Toward morning, a stiff wind blew up, tossing the barge madly over the bay. Great waves poured over the panic-stricken animals.

A jolt, a ripping of metal as the craft hit a boulder! With more waves tumbling in and water rushing through a hole in the bottom, the barge began to sink.

Tamaso and the other soldier worked their way between the terrified horses, who were strangely quiet in this awful moment. As soon as possible, they cut every one free.

'Swim!' said Tamaso. 'Swim, my friend — Jingo! In

Off to the Philippines

this dire time and period of anxiety, lead your companions to shore.'

As the barge settled down farther in the water, Jingo scrambled to the side. The faint morning light showed land in front of him. He plunged into the boiling water.

Top Kick gave one frantic look at the shoreline a half-mile away as he felt the floor sinking under his feet. He leapt after Jingo.

Blowing and puffing, the entire forty horses finally reached the rocky coast. As they scrambled through the boulders up onto the beach, they found that the two soldiers were with them. The men had been pulled through shark-infested waters to shore by the last two horses in the string.

Jingo and Top Kick had reached Bataan!



20. THE BRIDGE ON BATAAN

WHEN the sun came up, the horses had wandered off to investigate this new place and to find grass to eat. Try as hard as they could, the two soldiers could not keep them together. At last Tamaso gave up his attempt to catch 'my friend Jingo,' and hopped up on Top Kick's bare back to go to camp for help. The other man stayed to watch the horses.

Tamaso pulled Top Kick's head around with the hal-

The Bridge on Bataan

ter-shank and urged him forward. But the horse had never been ridden without a bridle and he did not like to leave the other horses. Tamaso kicked Top Kick's sides and at last he moved out. Once started, he trotted along the beach toward the great ridge of Mariveles. In a few places he had to splash through the waves to get around rocks and trees, but most of the way he galloped easily along on smooth sandy stretches. Then they came to a *barrio*, a small native village.

Grass houses on stilts, with pigs and chickens under them, lined the shore. Brown children, completely naked or clad only in tiny shirts, scampered out of their way. Tamaso pulled Top Kick to a stop. A Filipino in a gay-flowered silk shirt, the tail outside his short pants, was on his way to the cockpit with a fighting-cock under his arm. Tamaso questioned him in Tagalog dialect. As the man answered, the cock squawked noisily. Top Kick stepped about uneasily.

Following the man's directions, Tamaso guided the bay horse along the dirt road which runs the full length of the east coast of the peninsula. They passed Filipinos cutting fields of rice with scythes and *bolos* (big knives), and in other places the grain was being threshed by enormous animals, going around and around, tramping the rice kernels out of the straw. A two-wheeled cart pulled by a complacent pony came toward them, and Top Kick eyed the *calesa* dubiously as it passed. Often clumps of banana, bamboo, and palm trees shaded them, but in the open stretches the sun was very hot. Top Kick was wet with sweat, as his rider coaxed him on.

At last they came to the town, or large *barrio*, of Mariveles, with its old Spanish church in the center of the

Top Kick

square, and palm trees, small shops, and lazy-looking houses around it. But the *mpa* huts on stilts made up most of the little settlement. On the street from the wharf, a string of Army trucks was carrying soldiers and equipment from the ships and barges to the camp.

Tamaso followed the great cloud of dust out of the town to find his lieutenant. Top Kick choked and coughed as the grit filled his nose and mouth, but he trotted on doggedly. Soon they reached the camp on the flats in old dried-out rice paddies. So thick was the fog of dust that the man and horse could hardly see the field of tents. Getting six thousand troops into position for six weeks of maneuvers was no small task. No wonder the Bataan dust flew!

Lieutenant Bayley cried out in relief when he saw Top Kick and Tamaso. His words tumbling over each other in his excitement, the boy told about the loss of the barge and how Jingo and Top Kick had led all the other horses to shore.

'Sir,' he begged, 'may I persuade you that I am blameless?'

'You've persuaded me.' Bayley laughed in spite of himself.

He hustled around to send men for the rest of the horses. But it was three days before all the animals could be rounded up and brought to camp.

In the meantime, Top Kick carried his master about the camp, where troops were marching in from the north and from Manila and were landing by boat at the town of Mariveles. More tents were going up, ditches being dug, and the place was in a hubbub, although each man knew his job and was doing it.

The Bridge on Bataan

The Engineer Corps was whittling out paths through the jungle and throwing bridges across the small streams. The Signal Corps was busy laying wire and setting up radio stations. The Quartermaster Corps was bringing in food and supplies by truck, mule-pack, and even drawn by *carabao*, or water buffaloes, the huge creatures that Top Kick had seen working in the rice fields. The Medical Corps was setting up hospital tents, taking care of all injuries, and giving out the quinine so necessary in that malaria-infested peninsula.

Tamaso, like many of the other Filipino soldiers, had great difficulty in getting down the four capsules of quinine each day. Lieutenant Bayley would show him how to gulp them down quickly, but the boy always finally chewed them up, making a very wry face as he swallowed them. Bad medicine it was, but the 'medicos' were determined there should be no malaria in the camp on Bataan.

Lieutenant Bayley rode Top Kick out to meet Jingo and his other barge companions. But something had happened to poor Jingo. He stumbled along with his ears flopping, his head drooping, and his mouth open, gasping for breath. Most of the others were acting the same way. They looked like a bunch of very sick horses.

The veterinary officers were called, but could not diagnose these new symptoms. Nothing they could do seemed to help the wretched animals. The horses refused to eat or drink, and the next morning very few of them would get to their feet. It looked as if every one of them would die.

'I am swooning with grief for my friend Jingo!' wailed Tamaso, making a great fuss, as Orientals are apt to do.

Top Kick

'Stop that noise, Tamaso. That doesn't help Jingo.'

'Please, sir, may I be permitted to view the diseased animals?' asked an old Filipino scout.

'Do you think you can help them?' asked Bayley gruffly, to hide his concern.

'Yes, sir, only give your kind permission,' begged the white-haired man.

By this time only one horse of the whole group was on his feet. The brown-faced man looked them over carefully, then smiled a bit and picked up a good-sized wisp of hay. He went to the wretched Jingo, opened his mouth and wiped it out thoroughly with the hay. For once in his life Jingo did not make trouble. In a moment the gray horse raised his head and worked his tongue around in his mouth. Then, when offered water, he drank it!

The man cleaned out each sick horse's mouth and every one got better at once. The next day all of them were eating and were practically as well as ever.

'My anxiety was terrible,' said Tamaso. 'Now my heart leaps for joy because my friend Jingo has recovered from the pucker in his mouth. He should eat his grass or the bark from trees with more discretion.'

Forage and grain had been provided for every animal in camp. More care was taken to keep the horses from grazing, since the plant life of Bataan was evidently not safe for American horses.

Over Bataan's rough mountain-sides poured the troops in mock warfare. Mariveles Mountain stood like a watchful sentinel above them. As Bayley on Top Kick rode on lonely scouting missions, he always gave it an early morning salutation. 'Hi!' he would say. 'What

The Bridge on Bataan

luck do you give us today?" or, "You're hiding your head in your cloud. Is that a warning?" If he commanded his platoon, with horses and men about him, he merely looked at the friendly mountain and murmured, "Hi!" so that only Top Kick's ears could hear.

Sometimes the horses and men were so intent on getting through the heavy jungle growth and in doing their part in the 'war' on the sides of Mariveles that they didn't see the great ridge. Again they galloped over the coastal plain, level with rice paddies, and saw it plainly.

One day Lieutenant Bayley led his outfit over some dried rolling ground, ever on the alert for patches of green grass which marked the water-holes. Top Kick was just taking off to jump one of these big green clumps, when out of it loomed a great head with enormous horns and a mammoth pair of shoulders. To stop would be to crash into the monster, so the quick-witted horse leaped suddenly as high as he could. He flew over the great *carabao*, who was raising himself out of his wallow or mudhole. But the unexpected jump pitched Bayley off. He landed hard on the baked soil and lay still. Paying no attention to the fearful creature near them, Top Kick went to his master and nosed his sleeve.

After a little the man stirred and patted his nose. At a word from Bayley, Top Kick knelt down, as the officer had taught him back at Fort Riley, and the rider painfully and slowly drew himself into the saddle. When Top Kick stood erect again, the eyes of the Filipino soldiers were big as saucers. After driving the ferocious-looking beast away, Tamaso rode up to his officer.

"After a large moment of anguish, sir, what did my eyes see?" he asked.

Top Kick

Nothing in every joint, Bayley answered impatiently, 'Well, I saw stars!'

'Stars over Mariveles are lucky stars, sir,' said Tamaso. Ever after that the superstitious Filipino boy talked about their luck being tied up with the mountain and the stars above it.

Bayley found the Philippine jungles interesting but difficult. As the troops fought their way through, bamboo leaves cut them like knives, and tangled vines often tripped the horses. They sometimes startled mountain deer, monkeys, and wild boars, which crashed through the jungle in fright. Naked Negritos, like the black dwarfs near Fort Stotsenburg, sometimes peered through foliage and quickly slipped out of sight.

One day, a huge *iguana* (or lizard) slithered through the undergrowth between Top Kick's legs. The horse reared in fright, for the creature was nearly five feet long. Bayley almost saw stars again, so close did he come to a hard fall!

Often the Fort Stotsenburg cavalry was in bivouac camp high up on the mountain-sides. The first night in such a place the weird chirping of millions of insects kept Top Kick awake and nervous. They sounded like a great chorus — one after another chiming in, until their song reached a high whistle. Then the low chirping began again, until the volume rose to another shrill whistle. This odd singing worried the nervous horse, but after a time he became used to it. Tree lizards called their blood-curdling 'Geck-o, geck-o,' after dark, and tropical birds, which had been quiet during the hours of light, made uncanny wild sounds. It took some time for the American men and horses to sleep through the sounds of the tropic night.

The Bridge on Bataan

One evening, as Bayley on Top Kick was returning from a scouting mission, a hush lay over the water. The sun was a red ball — ready to drop down behind Mari-veles. Bayley looked at the island across a two-mile channel of water from the tip of Bataan.

'Just looks like a little old pile of rocks, doesn't it?' said the man to his horse. 'Seems deserted, too, and no account!'

Top Kick began to trot on toward camp, where he knew his oats and hay were waiting for him. But Bayley reined him to a standstill, and stared thoughtfully, through a break in the foliage, at Corregidor.

'Full of insides, that island is,' he said. 'Tunnels with cannon on tracks, guns, and supplies. What a fort that is to guard the bay!'

Top Kick pawed the ground impatiently. 'I wonder if it will ever be put to the test?' Bayley mused, as he signaled Top Kick to go.

But now the animal would not move. He snorted and backed up, trembling all over.

There in front of them was an enormous snake hanging from a tree. It had just stunned, with a blow from its nose, a wild chicken that had been finding a place to roost for the night. With one big gulp the snake swallowed the fowl, then dropped to the ground. A bulge — the chicken — began to move down its length. So intent was the huge reptile on its meal, it did not even notice the startled horse and rider.

Top Kick was numb with fear for a moment; then he whirled and ran. And the frightened Bayley let him choose his own speed.

At the camp the Filipino soldiers were telling about

Top Kick

seeing a thirty-foot python, big enough to squeeze a man or even a horse to death. All that night Top Kick stood on the picket line too excited to sleep. For a time he listened to the native soldiers as they played their guitars and sang old Filipino and Spanish songs, but he kept a sharp ear alert for jungle sounds.

During maneuvers the cavalry troops trotted along an old logging road that went back into the mountains. They climbed deep gullies and followed the cool, swift streams, where the men washed their clothes during overnight camps. They found a hot spring, which Top Kick sniffed at in disgust, for it had a bad odor.

So rugged was most of the country of Bataan that the mechanized vehicles could operate only along the coast and on a few open roads. The horses more than proved their usefulness in the mountains and the jungles.

One of the field problems was to execute a good retreat from northern Bataan to the very tip of the peninsula, anticipating a final stand on the 'pile of rocks,' Corregidor. The engineers had cut trails, made rafts and built bridges for the maneuvers, just as they would do in real warfare. But one day, as the forces were hard pushed by the 'enemy,' they found it necessary to span a gully one hundred and fifty feet wide and seventy-five feet deep, through which ran a swift mountain stream. Lieutenant Bayley and his outfit stood watching proceedings, as they waited to cross the bridge which the Filipino soldiers were building.

Strong rattan vines were lashed across the box-like canyon, and tightened at each end. The men were laying pieces of bamboo crosswise, side by side, on these green cables, to make a suspension bridge.

The Bridge on Bataan

When the floor of the narrow bridge was almost done, there was a sudden cry. The sprawling body of one of the workers shot toward the water far below.

One look down the gully-side nearest him showed Bayley a sheer wall of stone. The other side was a steep bank of stone and clay. There was but one thing to do! Top Kick and he must cross the uncompleted bridge and get down that rough and treacherous bank before the man drowned.

Quickly blindfolding Top Kick, Bayley began leading him across the shaky structure. Top Kick trembled from head to foot and nuzzled Bayley's shoulder pleadingly.

But he followed, gingerly placing one foot and then another on the swaying support.

Then, breathing hard, Bayley quietly coaxed Top Kick on. Groans came from the Filipino soldiers as they watched. Would horse and man go hurtling toward the stream below?

But officer and mount crept on, step by step, along the narrow, uncertain footing. Once a bamboo rolled under Top Kick's foot. Horse and man wobbled on the swaying bridge. They made it! Seizing the cloth from Top Kick's eyes, Bayley urged him to the gully's edge.

Slipping and sliding, with Bayley on his back, the horse started down the steep incline. To the breathless watchers up above their feat seemed impossible. But Top Kick's long practice on the Fort Riley slides helped him now! Soon he was so near the bottom that with a quick leap and a run he was at the water's edge!

Bayley leaned down and grabbed the man, whose fall had so injured him that he was drowning. He and Top Kick had saved the man's life!

Top Kick

'Just another job,' said Bayley modestly, when the man had been rushed off to the 'medico.' 'Taking care of our men is what officers are supposed to do. But Top Kick's training and his absolute confidence in me was what made it possible.'

Then he turned to Top Kick to fondle him lovingly, and lifted a hand in salute to the friendly mountain. His lucky star of Mariveles had been with him once more!



21. CLARK FIELD IS BOMBED

MONTHS of heat, months of rain, had gone by since the cavalry troops returned to Fort Stotsenburg after the Bataan maneuvers. On a cool, delightful December day, Lieutenant Bayley and Top Kick had enjoyed a brisk trip down to the *barrio* and were coming back to the post.

'Almost twelve o'clock,' said Bayley, looking at his watch as they jogged along. 'Lunch time, and I'm hungry!' he added, patting the brown neck.

Top Kick

As they came to Clark Field, Tamaso met them on Jingo.

'The American officers are disturbed in their minds, sir. Great excitement prevails!' he said.

'What's up?' asked Bayley.

'The radio divulges the information that the Hawaiian Islands have grave trouble, sir,' he said.

'Yes?' said Bayley. 'Well, what's their trouble?' The officer knew that his Filipino troopers got excited easily, so Tamaso's news only mildly interested him.

The anti-aircraft soldiers were in the middle of Clark Field, looking up in the sky. Bayley heard the faint drone of aircraft.

High in the air were about fifty planes in perfect formation. On they came in two great waves. It was a pretty sight.

'Don't look like Army planes,' said Bayley, as they came nearer. 'Must be the Navy.'

'May I persuade you, sir, that they may be Japanese?' Tamaso said persistently.

'Japanese?'

'The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor today, sir,' said the boy simply.

'Good Heavens, Tamaso! Why didn't you tell me?' cried Bayley.

At that moment there was a deafening sound, and dirt shot up from the airfield. Shock upon shock followed as fountains of dust and smoke sprang up in a straight line across the field.

The truck which had just taken chow to the anti-aircraft men received a direct hit. The air was filled with flying débris. Louder and louder crashed the bombs in a

Clark Field Is Bombed

deafening tumult. It seemed that the end of the world had come! With a final bang the last bomb landed and the planes left. An uncanny quiet settled down over the field.

Top Kick and Jingo had hugged the ground during the bombing, shaking with fear. With all the gunfire they had heard, they had never known anything like this. Bayley was so stunned he was in a daze.

'My eyes have seen a great bombilation, sir!' cried Tamaso. 'My stomach cries out in distress.'

'It makes me sick, too,' said the lieutenant, patting his trembling horses. 'We're in it now, Top Kick — the scrap Muggins talked about. This is war.'

On the field men were running and yelling to each other. They were ready for action. Bayley put heels into Top Kick's sides and the two horses ran for the stables.

Just as the officer and his man were dismounting, pursuit planes swept over, carrying the insignia of the rising sun. They seemed to pour in from every direction at once, but in an orderly criss-cross pattern. Each came in at a sharp angle, then dove straight at the field. They were so close Bayley could see the goggles and helmets of the aviators as they skimmed over the trees. With the peculiar whine of diving planes came the chatter of the anti-aircraft guns. The men on Clark Field were fighting back.

On the other side of the stables a 'dog-fight' was going on. The American P-40 dove at a Jap pursuit plane, retreated, and was at him again. A flash of fire! For an instant the Jap plane hung in the air, then fell with a long tail of flames.

Top Kick

Tamaso yelled, 'Bravo, bravo!' and jumped up and down.

The smoke was thick over the airfield as the din of bombs, falling planes, and machine guns ceased. The last pursuit from Japan sped away.

Bayley took a big breath and looked at his watch. 'That raid lasted less than an hour,' he said.

The bay horse nudged his master.

'Yes, yes,' said Bayley, 'that's what we're here for, Top Kick — to stop this sort of business. It's a nasty job, but we've got to get at it.' He jumped into the saddle and galloped to headquarters.

After the Japanese had struck that first blow on the Philippine Islands, they tried to land on several of the beaches and were successful in northern Luzon. When they threatened the Lingayen Gulf area, Lieutenant Bayley's outfit went by portee trailers to help defend it.

As Top Kick carried his master along the beach, he was on familiar ground. The Fort Stotsenburg cavalry had spent many days firing at objects towed by a tug out in the bay. That practice would come in handy now!

Scouts were stationed up and down the beaches to watch for the enemy. Men and horses grew restless and tense with the waiting.

One dark night, a line of black shapes appeared a half-mile offshore. A huge bulk loomed far in the background.

'Destroyers, I'll bet. The big one, a battleship or heavy cruiser,' said Bayley, shivering with apprehension. The horse nickered under his breath.

'Yes, Top Kick, I am afraid, too. That doesn't make

Clark Field Is Bombed

me coward. What matters it how I fight when they come ashore.'

Shortly before dawn, the destroyers laid down a barrage on five miles of the beach and planes flew overhead. Through this curtain of fire, glimpses could be caught of huge transports, boats filled with soldiers spilling out of the mother-craft.

As the landing boats approached, the American forces went into action. Bayley's troop helped man the guns. They poured wave after wave of fire upon the boats. The fire was returned by the ships, and strafing planes peppered the shore. One by one the small boats foundered and went down. The roar of battle reached Top Kick, where he was picketed under a banyan tree. He pawed the earth frantically and jerked at his halter-shank.

When at last the carriers and destroyers steamed out to sea, not a single man had landed on the beach.

Bayley's troop was soon sent to a town on Lingayen Gulf which was being bombed periodically. Many of its people were moving out, and what a crowd they were! Here was an enormous *carabao* with wide horns, lumbering along and dragging a heavy cart piled high with furniture and family portraits. Tan hump-backed Indian cows staggered under loads of grain and fruit, but plodded along. Dapper little Mongolian ponies tried to trot as they pulled two-wheeled *calesas* full of women, children, and big baskets. Some of the brown people trudged in the dust leading goats, pigs, and dogs. Old men carried their precious fighting-cocks, absent-mindedly massaging them as they walked. Babies cried, old folks argued, but most of them went along quietly. They

Top Kick

were downcast and heart-broken! It was a pathetic procession!

Landings were attempted by the Japs again and again on Lingayen Gulf. But as the planes increased in numbers and the volume of their gunfire grew, the American troops could not hold their beaches. Some of the slant-eyed enemy managed to get ashore in spite of the staunch defense. Others came down from the north to join them. They seemed to appear suddenly from nowhere riding bicycles, in commandeered school buses and trucks. Often they wore the clothes of the Filipinos. They popped up in the most unexpected places, where the cavalymen could not fight them for fear of killing the natives. Bayley's troop was worn out from the constant vigilance and fighting. With the enemy everywhere at once, there was no time to sleep or eat.

Tamaso worried over his lieutenant as well as over his horses, Top Kick and 'my friend Jingo.' Every minute he could snatch from his troop duties he was trying to make Bayley more comfortable and caring for the horses.

One day, when Bayley was in charge of guarding the town, he rode along almost deserted streets. Top Kick spied Jingo in front of a shop and whinnied. Bayley gave him his head and he trotted up to the gray.

As Tamaso came out of the nearly empty market stall, he was crestfallen.

'Sir, you cannot subsist forever on "iron" rations. You do not yearn for the food from cans, and I cannot acquire suitable viands to tempt you,' said Tamaso.

'Good Heavens, man, Army grub is all right. Don't bother about that.'



Top Kick

At that moment, the Rising-Sun bombers appeared and dropped their load. The horses trembled as the bombs exploded in the water not far away.

When the bombing ceased and the planes flew away, Tamaso jubilantly cried out, 'Our profuse enemy befriends us today!'

He hopped on Jingo and galloped down to the wharf. Bayley and Top Kick followed and saw that the surface of the water was covered with fish, stunned by the bombs. The officer held Jingo, who snorted angrily as he smelled the fish. Tamaso grabbed a *banca*, a native outrigger canoe, and quickly paddled out where the fish were the thickest. He soon filled the boat.

That night Bayley's entire troop had a great feast of fish and rice. The Filipinos enjoyed their peace-time fare with gusto and smacking sounds of appreciation.

Tamaso brought the food to Bayley and stood over him to watch him eat.

'Does not this repast delight your nostrils, sir?' he asked eagerly.

Bayley, who disliked the odor of fish nearly as much as Jingo did, smiled and took a bite.

'Do you not chew with pleasure? Does it not tickle your palate?' Tamaso insisted.

Bayley admitted it was a pleasant change and praised the food to Tamaso's satisfaction.

Two weeks after the Japanese bombed Clark Field, they swarmed ashore like a cloud of locusts, compelling the American forces at Lingayen to fall back. Fighting steadily, the outnumbered but stubborn defenders were pushed south. The cavalry protected the flanks most of the time. But it often had the difficult task of delaying

Clark Field Is Bombed

the enemy while the main body occupied a new position in the rear.

One day, when Bayley's troop with other cavalry units was covering the infantry movement, tanks had just withdrawn through the lines. Then down the middle of the road came two more.

The captain rode over and shouted: 'What's the big idea? Why are you so slow?'

A head popped up out of the turret, but there was no reply. Again the officer demanded an explanation. The lid banged down. The tanks belched gunfire! They were Jap tanks.

Fences and irrigation ditches lined the highway. There was only one escape. All the horses tore down the road, with bullets popping around them and the rattle of machine-gun fire behind them. If a trooper fell off his horse, he was trampled. Top Kick with flying feet nimbly dodged the other horses and carried Bayley through safely.

As they thundered along, they could hardly pass a truck on a bridge. Some officers had smashed its gasoline tank and splashed the contents over the truck and bridge. As the last trooper sped by, it burst into flame. Almost instantly there was a crackling fierce fire and great clouds of black smoke. But it stopped the enemy tanks in their tracks, and the main body of the Americans swept on.

No sleep that night! Back the cavalry went through the darkness to surprise the Japs in a morning attack. But when the sun came up, they were surrounded. That was a terrible battle and Bayley and Top Kick fought their way out through rifle, mortar, and machine-gun fire with airplanes screaming above them!

Top Kick

When the cavalry was able to free themselves of the enemy, it was almost morning. Bayley and Tamaso were eating hardtack and getting out oats for their horses, when the enemy's long-range guns began firing. Their position had been spotted. The shell-bursts were bad enough, but the 'ack-ack-ack' of the machine guns on both sides was worse! The main body was compelled to move out. The cavalry held a line to protect them as usual, and all day they stayed in their fox holes. Top Kick didn't like hiding, but he made no fuss. At least it gave him time to eat his oats and rest his tired muscles.

That evening the cavalry pulled out to retire again under cover of the night. The road was full of machines of every sort — soldiers in vehicles, on horse, and even a few on foot, who clambered aboard anything on wheels. What a night that was! Just before morning they reached the new position and Bayley snatched a few winks of sleep close beside Top Kick. After such hectic days, the horse was restless and watched over his master, alert for every sound.

At daylight, firing from the outposts showed that the Japs were coming. Red native buses tore down upon them. The puzzled Americans were fooled only a minute, and as the Japs poured out of the stolen buses their opponents gave them a hot time of it. 'Clack-clack-clack,' rumbled the enemy tanks into the fray.

One Filipino hopped aboard a Jap tank and tried to pry the lid open with his bayonet. But it stuck tight. He was ramming a grenade down the muzzle of its cannon, when he felt a bayonet in the seat of his pants and was forced off.

After that bitter fight, the cavalry dropped back again.

Clark Field Is Bombed

The country was rough and the footing uncertain. Some of the troopers fell asleep in their saddles on the way. The horses were so tired they had lost all their spring and were barely able to put one foot in front of the other.

That night was Christmas Eve, but no one had thought of it. For the first time in forty-eight hours, the men had time to eat. They sat about the rolling kitchen enjoying hot 'slum' (or canned beef stew) and coffee, but Bayley slipped away. He went to Top Kick, to feed him, rub him down, and treat his pack and cinch sores. Weary to the point of exhaustion, the man could not eat until he knew his horse was comfortable.

'Where's Tamaso?' he asked. Jingo's ears went up, but no boy appeared.

Finally the captain brought Bayley a dish of the stew.

'You did some quick thinking today, Bayley,' he said. 'You got us out of some bad spots.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Bayley. 'Top Kick is wonderful. He seems to watch the battle, avoids the most dangerous holes, and leaps ahead at the least suggestion of a signal. Why, he almost thinks for me!'

Just then Tamaso came with a pile of hay on his back. He had trudged back a couple of miles to where he had spied some good hay.

'Tamaso, you were too tired for that!' said Bayley.

'When my remembrance informed me this is Christmas Eve, I was renewed in my spirits,' he said. 'Behold my Christmas gift for Top Kick and my friend Jingo.'

The tired horses whinnied to the boy and began to munch their hay.

'What a Christmas Eve!' said Bayley.

The exhausted troops were stretched on the bare

Top Kick

ground at the edge of a *barrio*. The village was in darkness. Ghostlike, holiday lanterns swayed on every house and hut, but there were no lights in them. Only the faint glow through the church door from the candles on the altar



22. TOP KICK, THE WAR-HORSE

DURING the withdrawal, the American forces had successfully broken off contact with the enemy. But it was now necessary to know where the Japs were concentrating. Several scouting parties were sent out, and Bayley with his platoon went to the northwest to search for the enemy.

That night the troopers rode the horses under cover of darkness to their outpost line, where they snatched a few winks of sleep on the ground. Shortly before daylight, they were on their way again.

Top Kick

Now the real work began. The twenty-five men spread out in a fan shape with Bayley on Top Kick in the lead. Through sugar-cane fields they went, around rice paddies and *barrios*. Bayley referred to his map occasionally to work toward rough, unpopulated country more suitable for enemy camps.

Cautiously and carefully, they slipped through the tall coarse cogan grass which could hide any number of the enemy. For some time they pushed ahead, the silence broken only by the creaking of saddles, the light tap of horses' hoofs, and the rustle of grass as they crept through it. Every man knew the danger they were in. Even the horses seemed to know the need for stealth and moved quietly. Top Kick stepped gingerly along, alert for every sound.

Suddenly, there was a crashing noise in the underbrush ahead. Every horse was pulled to a quick stop. Men and mounts stood motionless. From several different directions came the snapping of twigs and heavy foot-falls. Those troopers who weren't well hidden by the grass and bushes crouched low. Then out walked a big tan Indian cow with the hump on its back. Other cattle came running after it and stopped suddenly when they saw the horses. The men grinned sheepishly at each other, but the experience was nerve-racking.

Soon they came to rougher country with boulders and scrub pine mixed with the tall grass. The going became more difficult and the need for care increased with the greater number of hiding-places.

As Top Kick was climbing a ridge, his ears suddenly perked up. He became tense. His whole manner showed that something strange lay ahead. Bayley caught the

Top Kick, the War-Horse

horse's signal and moved forward alone with even greater alertness.

When they topped the ridge and peeked through a clump of trees, a large encampment lay before them in the valley. Tanks, mechanized vehicles, tents, and a great number of troops showed them that this was the main body of the enemy. Bayley and his detail had successfully moved through their outpost line. Evidently by the careful movement of the scouting party and the overconfidence of the Japs, Bayley had before him the information he needed. Like a statue, the horse and man stood motionless. But Bayley studied the entire valley carefully. Breathing hard with excitement, he turned Top Kick cautiously and dropped back over the hill.

When he reached his men, Bayley motioned to one of them who had a basket of Signal Corps homing pigeons. He quickly wrote two messages, giving the location and an estimate of the numbers of the enemy, and put them in capsules on the legs of a pair of birds. If either of the pigeons got through, the information would reach the colonel in less than half an hour. Then Bayley's scouting mission would have been completed. He sent the trooper a good distance away from the others to liberate the birds, so that even they might not give the enemy a hint that the United States cavalrymen were near.

Still not daring to speak a word aloud, Lieutenant Bayley motioned and gave whispered directions, sending the men back to their troop. He and Tamaso with their horses remained to watch the enemy camp.

All day long the officer and Filipino kept vigil over that valley. When soldiers started to pour out of it through the lower end of the valley, Bayley set a pigeon

Top Kick

free to carry the news. When new troops came in from the north, another bird started on its way.

But all this time Top Kick and Jingo were hidden carefully, and Tamaso stayed with them to keep them quiet while Bayley spied on the enemy. The men hardly dared eat corned beef from their packs or give their horses oats from the saddle-bags for fear they would be careless and give themselves away while they ate.

But late in the afternoon, Top Kick grew uneasy and pawed the ground. Tamaso could not quiet him. Finally, when his quick ears caught a suspicious sound he whinnied. That brought the officer on the run. Both men leaped into their saddles and dashed down the hill. Bullets whizzed after them! It was a close call!

'Top Kick is too good a scout!' said Bayley breathlessly, after they had galloped far enough to be out of immediate danger. 'He knew the Japs were coming up that hill, but his warning whinny almost finished us!'

As the two men rode along, they were tired and sleepy. But they must stay on the alert.

'Geck-o, geck-o!' cried a big lizard, and fell out of the tree directly under Jingo's feet. Before the horse could stop, he had trampled and killed it.

Tamaso cried: 'Oh, my friend Jingo, you bring a curse to us. A dead gecko signifies bad luck. Woe betide us!'

It took Bayley quite a while to pacify the boy. Finally Tamaso stopped 'bemoaning their fate' aloud, but he was still worrying over what might happen to him and 'my friend Jingo.'

The horses jogged on toward the troop. As they went farther away from the enemy camp, they were less cautious. They passed some good grass and Tamaso begged

Top Kick, the War-Horse

for time to let the horses graze awhile. At another place he hopped off Jingo to pick some mangoes, his lieutenant's favorite fruit. So quiet was this countryside that both men were lulled into a feeling of security.

Then Top Kick began to fidget. His ears perked up straight and he moved along nervously. Bayley should have caught his horse's warning at once, but he was slouched in the saddle, almost dozing. Tamaso, too, was dead tired. Weeks of constant moving, fighting with little rest and sleep, were beginning to take their toll on both men. The horses, too, dragged their feet, but Top Kick was never too weary to keep on the alert. Now he trembled all over.

Bayley sat up with a jerk as his quick eyes caught a suspicious movement in front of them. He pulled Top Kick to his haunches. In a deep, wide irrigation ditch not fifty feet away, leafy branches waved mysteriously around a machine-gun barrel pointing toward the American camp. Slant-eyed brown faces peeked out at them.

That instant pistol shots rang out and bullets whizzed by their ears! Nothing to get behind for protection! There was but one thing to do; Bayley did it!

Jerking out his pistol he cried, 'Come on!' as Top Kick sprang ahead. Firing and yelling, he charged the machine-gun nest with Jingo close behind.

But in that wild dash Top Kick tripped in a tangled mass of rattan. Bayley and he fell headlong, directly in front of the machine-gun nest.

Jingo hesitated an instant as horse and man crashed to the ground. The trembling boy on his back, muttering 'Gecko' was no help. A whiff of fish! The gray plunged forward in sudden anger. Maddened with hate

Top Kick

by that odor, he leapt into the ditch. Like a thunderbolt he struck savagely with his forefeet at the astounded Japs.

When Jingo and Tamaso had cleaned out the machine-gun nest, Top Kick was on his feet, nosing Bayley. At the man's signal he kneeled down. Painfully and slowly, Bayley crawled into the saddle.

Sounds behind them! Bayley's tenseness sent the horse bounding forward. In the ditch all was quiet. Jingo lay dead with Tamaso close beside him.

The crack of gunfire from the rear! To go either to the right or the left was dangerous. Collecting himself, Top Kick gave a mighty jump into the air. The ditch was wide and deep, but over he went. He landed in the soft dirt on the other side, scrambled to catch his balance, and was off again.

More pistol shots! Bayley grew limp. He had been hit by a bullet. A sharp burning pain, as if a horse had kicked him, stung Top Kick's flank. The animal smelled blood.

'Home, Top Kick, home,' Bayley said, and clung to the saddle.

Never before had Top Kick been called upon for such a task. A long four miles lay ahead. He was weary, tortured with pain. But he never faltered. Through the gathering darkness, he sped with all the power that was in him.

Bayley slumped more and more. Top Kick had to be careful to keep under that dead weight, so that the man would not fall out of the saddle. He had to bring his pace down to a cautious canter, but he still pushed ahead as fast as he dared.

The smell of blood grew stronger and Top Kick was

Top Kick, the War-Horse

limping badly. No reins to guide him! No knees to urge him on! No road to follow, only the rough cross-country where the scouting party had gone! It took all the wit the horse had to retrace his way to camp in the darkness.

In fifteen minutes Top Kick drew up to the tents and Bayley slid into the arms of his troopers who ran to meet them. The horse had made it!

For several days Top Kick did not see Bayley. A veterinary officer took care of his gunshot wound and the men treated him like a hero. But the camp was moved, fighting was going on, and there was so much confusion and noise that the poor horse was bewildered. With his flank paining frightfully, he whinnied and whinnied for his master. He missed Jingo, who always stood beside him on the picket line or in the stables, and Tamaso's extra care.

But at last Bayley came to him, with his shoulder bandaged and smelling of medicine. Top Kick nickered his joy and put his head against his chest.

'Top Kick, you saved my life!' said Bayley, holding that brown head affectionately.

The horse nuzzled closer to him.

Then he led Top Kick to a tent where an injured boy lay. It was Tamaso! The horse stuck his head through the flap and the Filipino petted him.

'Oh, Top Kick, my ears and eyes have been filled with horrible sound and sight. But you are my beam of comfort!'

Men of Bayley's troop came up to make much over their lieutenant, his horse, and the boy. In the attack, after the pigeon had brought Bayley's message of the enemy's position, they had found Tamaso still alive in

Top Kick

the ditch beside the body of 'my friend Jingo.' The four dead Japs and their machine-gun near-by proved Tamaso's bravery. His modesty in giving the credit to Jingo brought laughter and added to his honor.

'When you laud my praises, I am overcome with passionate fullness,' he said. 'I must forever be the brave trooper your deliberation makes me.'

Mess call sounded and the men hurried away. Tamaso looked at Bayley with shining eyes, then buried his head in his pillow, crying, 'My friend Jingo! My friend Jingo!' Bayley allowed Top Kick to nuzzle the sobbing lad, then slowly led him away.

Day after day the American forces, under General MacArthur, withdrew into Bataan with the cavalry guarding their rear flank. Bayley and Tamaso went with their troop in these rapid moves, but could take no part in the fighting owing to their injuries. At last, when the 'Gate to Bataan' was closed, the outfit fled into the mountains.

Some time later, Bayley and Top Kick worked their way back to a ridge overlooking Manila Bay. There, like a lazy dog guarding the harbor, lay Mariveles with the 'great light,' as Tamaso called the sun, going down behind it.

'Hi!' said Bayley to the mountain. 'What is it today?'

Horse and man stood immovable as they looked at the cloud on the mountain's head, a shining crown of light with ribbons of bright colors.

'I came to these islands just a boy,' said Bayley thoughtfully to his horse. 'In less than a month this war has turned me into an old man. Like Tamaso, I can say, "My eyes have seen terrible sights!" I have seen the war

Top Kick, the War-Horse

turn men into beasts. I have also seen war lift men to something bigger than themselves.'

Top Kick quivered slightly under him.

'Yes, old boy, we've seen men and horses tested. Poor Jingo sacrificed his life in the war and made it possible for you and me to live. Tamaso's fear turned to bravery. But you were the best soldier of all, doing intelligently and well every job you were ordered to do.'

Bayley still looked at the play of color and the twisting cloud effects in the sunset. But Top Kick pulled sharply on the reins. He wanted to go.

'Muggins let you do that, old boy. I never could break you of that trick,' he laughed.

Then he grew solemn again. 'Shall we go home to her, Top Kick?' he wondered. 'War is terrible, but not to fight is more terrible. Whether or not we return to her, you and I must get back into this scrap! These Japs must be stopped or not even Muggins will be safe.'

The horse yanked the reins again. The sun had slipped behind the mountain. It was growing dark and the stars were coming out.

'My lucky stars!' said Bayley. 'Hi!' he added to the mountain. 'Top Kick and I are on our way to you. We're off to join MacArthur's forces in Bataan!'

Top Kick moved out briskly. Wherever his master wanted to go, there he would take him!

THE END

